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Subscription number for Blues Matters is
(00-44-0)1778 392082

ORDERS (other):
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Printed by Warner Print Group **Distributed by** Warners Distribution Group
Blues Matters! Registered office: Mitchell Meredith, St David's House, 48 Free Street, Brecon, LD3 7BN

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Editor in Chief's comment
WELCOME to BM 124

OK folks, fans and readers... welcome indeed to 2022 and the post-Christmas issue of Blues Matters!

We trust you stayed safe through the holiday period, if we still called it that. I guess most will have had a quiet time but hopefully a relaxed one to gather our strength and energy to cope with the ongoing Worldwide situation of Covid. Let's make the most of it and enjoy what we can while staying 'responsible'!

In your hands you hold the latest volume of Blues Matters which is bursting at the seams with great articles and exploding with colour and talent.

I hope that those of you who got to the award-winning Great Rock & Blues Festival in Skegness had a fantastic time, particularly at our Blues Matters Stage in Hotshots. Sadly, our team was short on manpower due to various effects of Covid on families and all that could not make it were a bit more than frustrated as indeed the rest of you fans will have been. Butlins' own terrific Entertainment team have been putting all their energy into their weekend events to ensure those who can go to them have a good time as possible.

Due to Covid, the EBA 2020 awards did not take place, although a message went out to recipients. We did not say anything as we received no 'Certificate' of the award but Blues Matters was inducted into the EBA Blues Hall of Fame having won Best European Blues Publication through 2017, 18 and 19 we are not able to win that again so we were therefore inducted as a life long recognition. Also in that Joe Bonamassa was included.

We are, needless to say, very proud of these awards and recognitions and thank everyone who voted for us Worldwide.

A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUT THERE!

Alan Pearce
Founder and Editor-in-Chief

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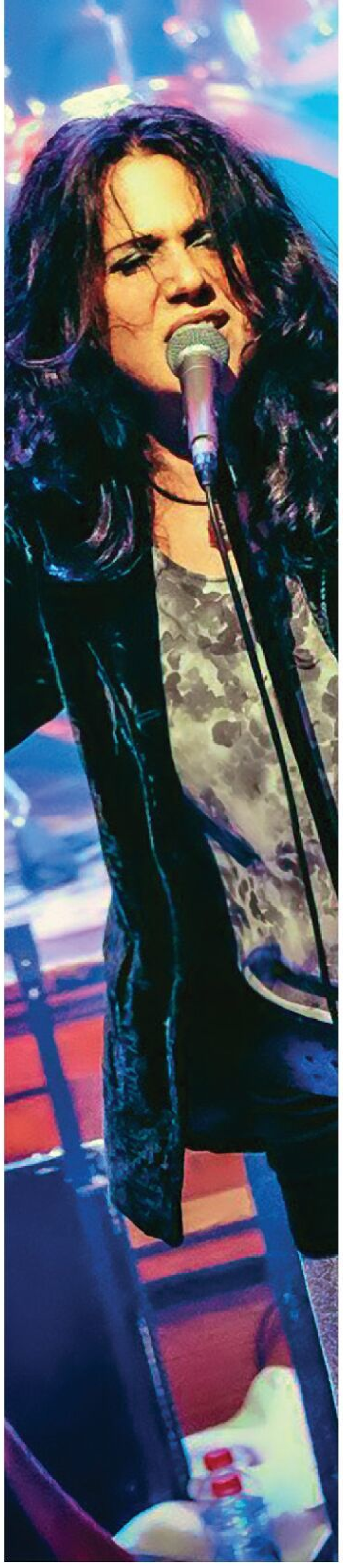
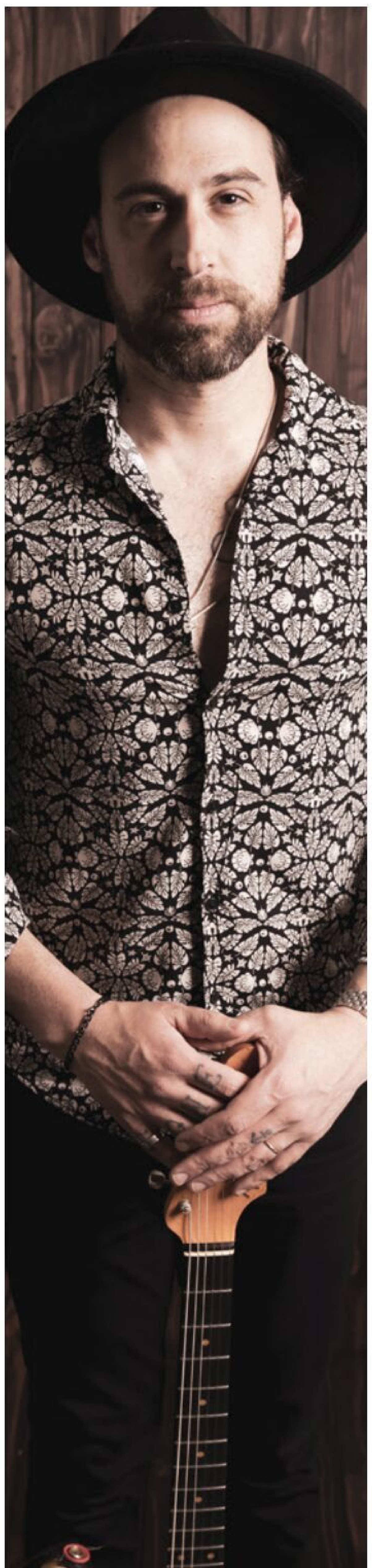

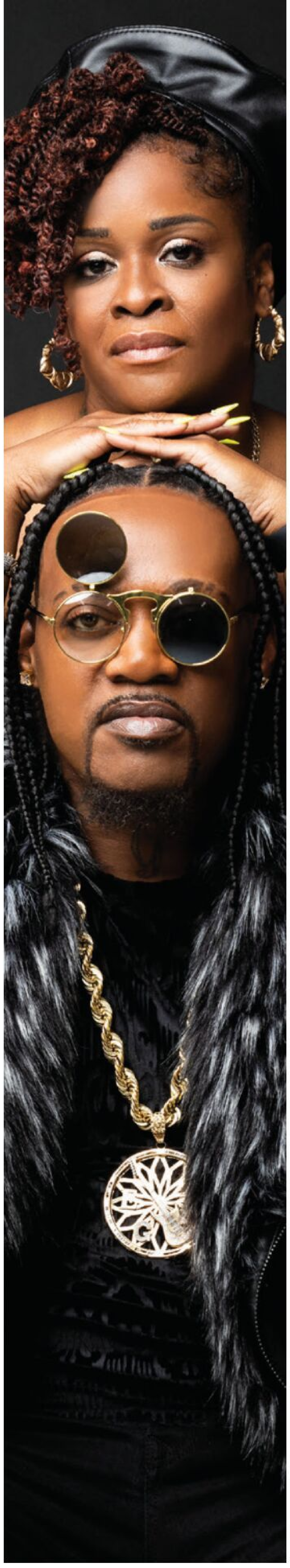

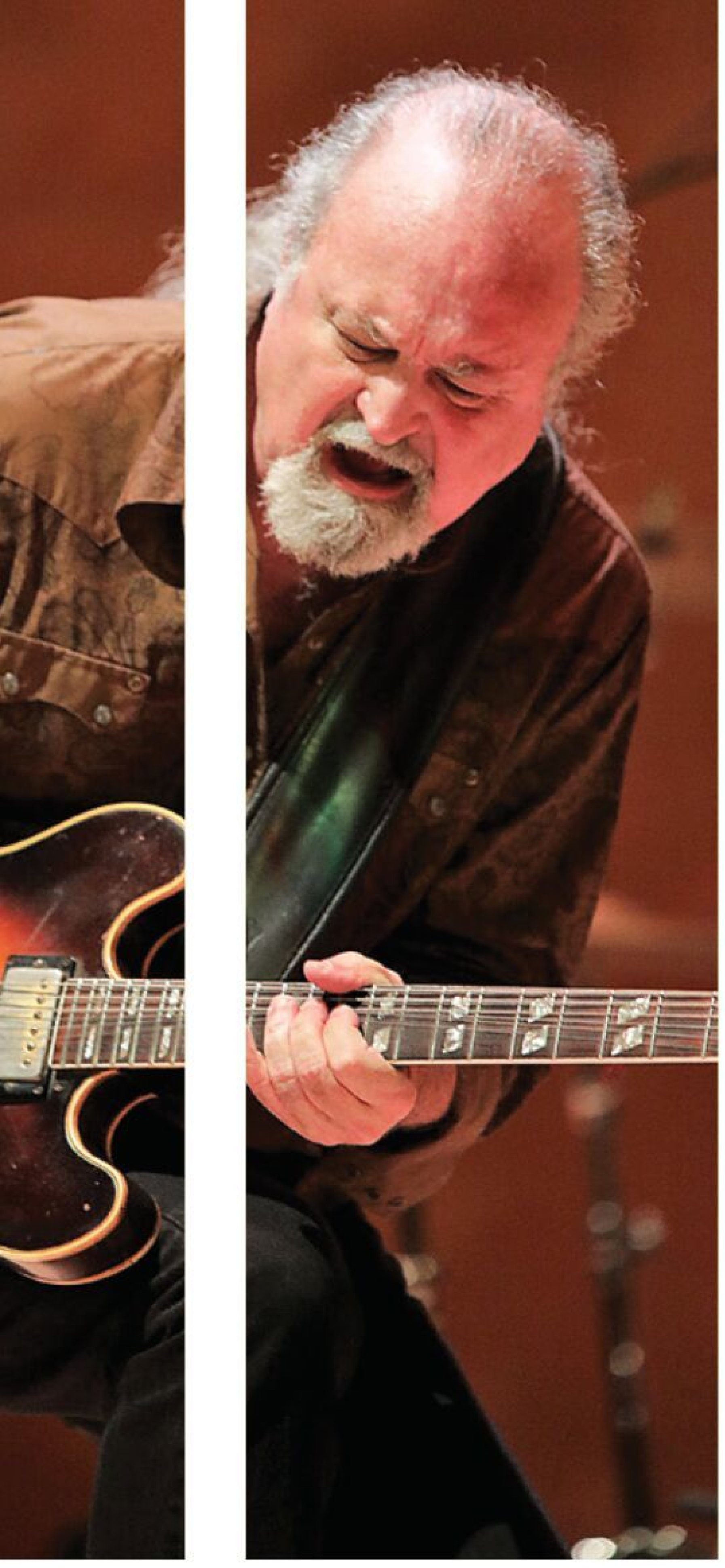

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BETH HART

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“I remember as a kid hearing Black Dog for the first time, and thought, If I ever become a singer, that’s what I want to sing - It blew my mind!”

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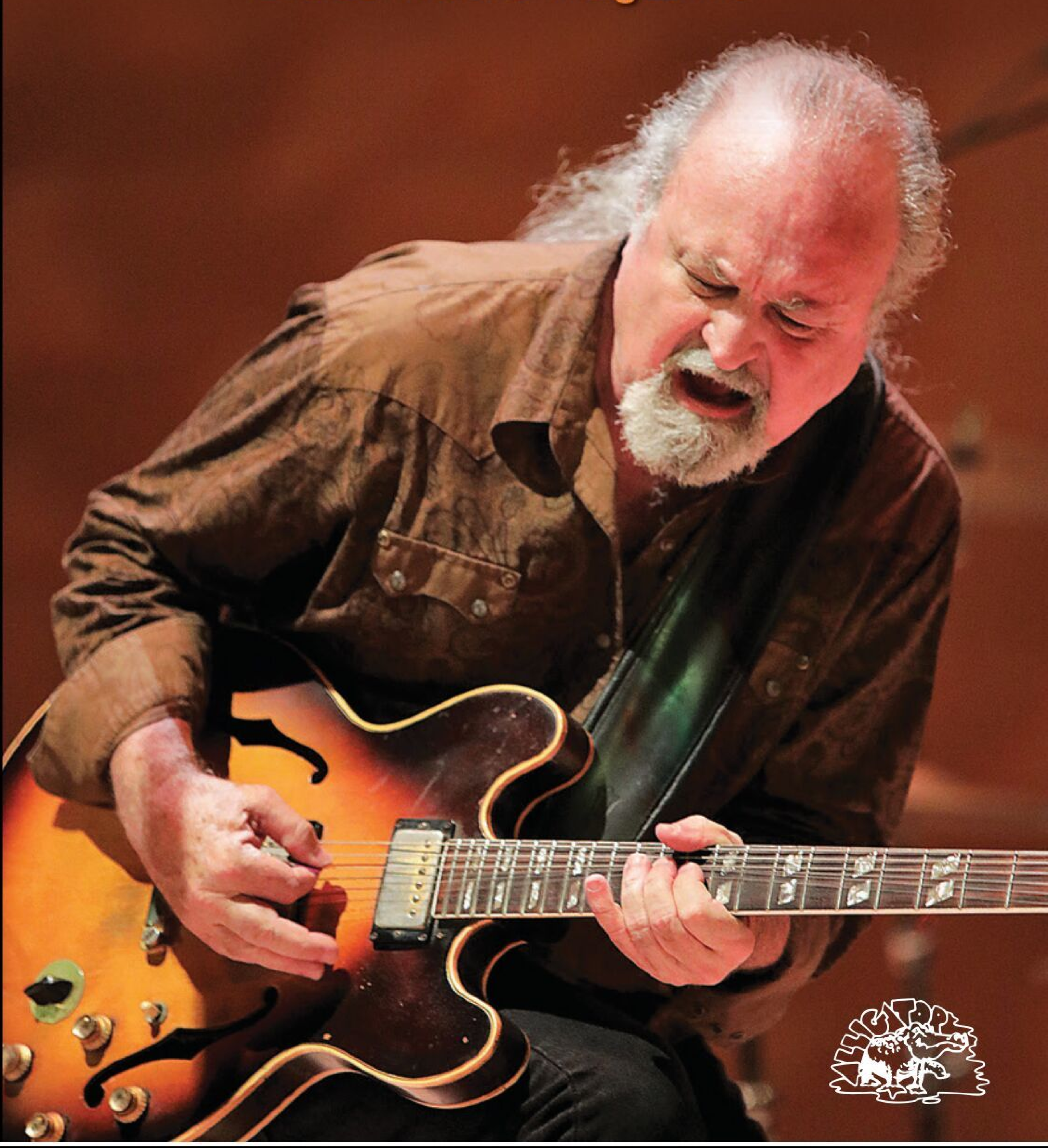

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LEGENDARY BLUES CRUISE

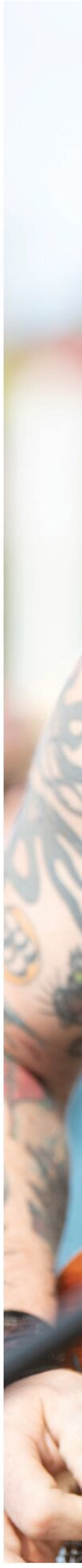
by **Anita Schlank** Images: **Laura Carbone**

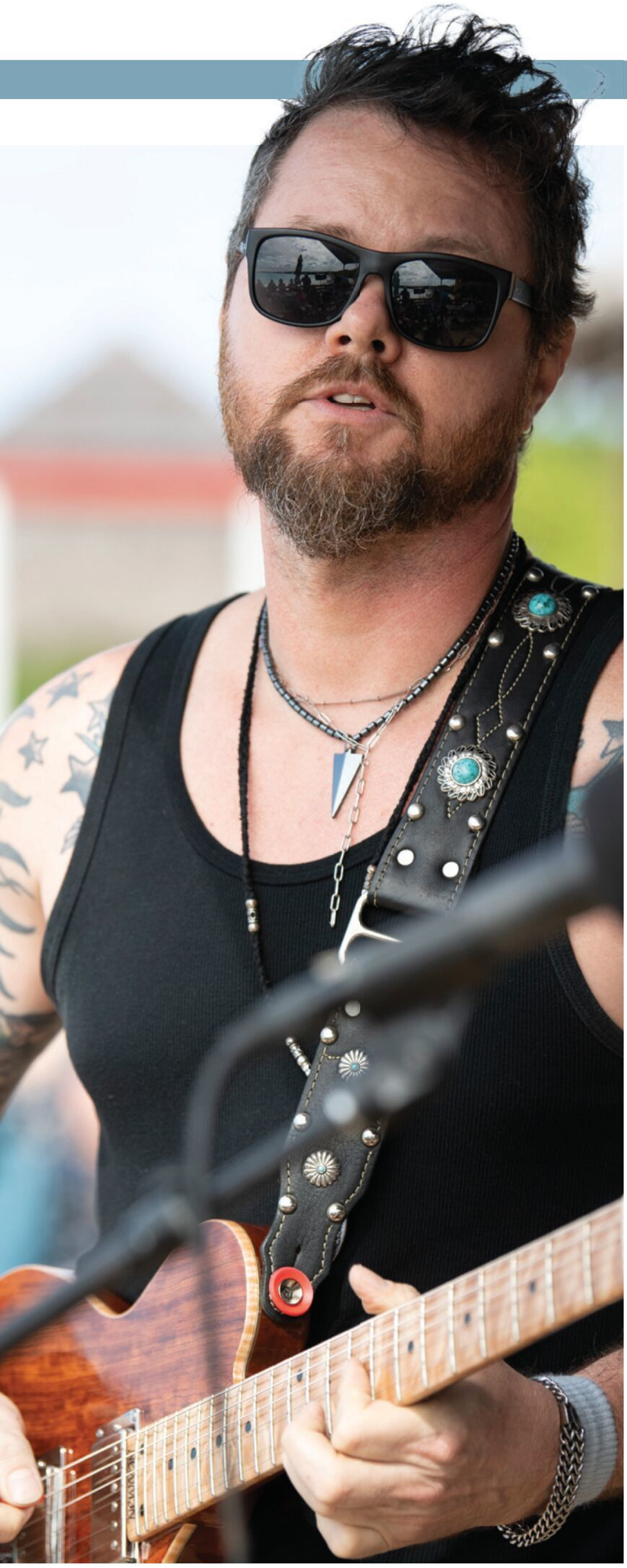
Many were a bit hesitant to get back on a cruise ship during COVID times, but after being assured by the numerous precautions that were taken by the cruise staff, those who braved the 35th LRBC to the Southern Caribbean were greatly rewarded.

The wonderful sail-away party starring the soulful veteran Curtis Salgado began the adventure that provided blues fans with both the opportunity to see old favorites, (such as “bad boy” Johnny Rawls, singer songwriter Ruthie Foster, and accordion player J.R. Lauritsen), and to get introduced to some new rising stars. Many were previously unfamiliar with, but highly impressed by, the Ruf Records Blues Caravan, starring Jeremiah Johnson, Whitney Shay and Ryan Perry.

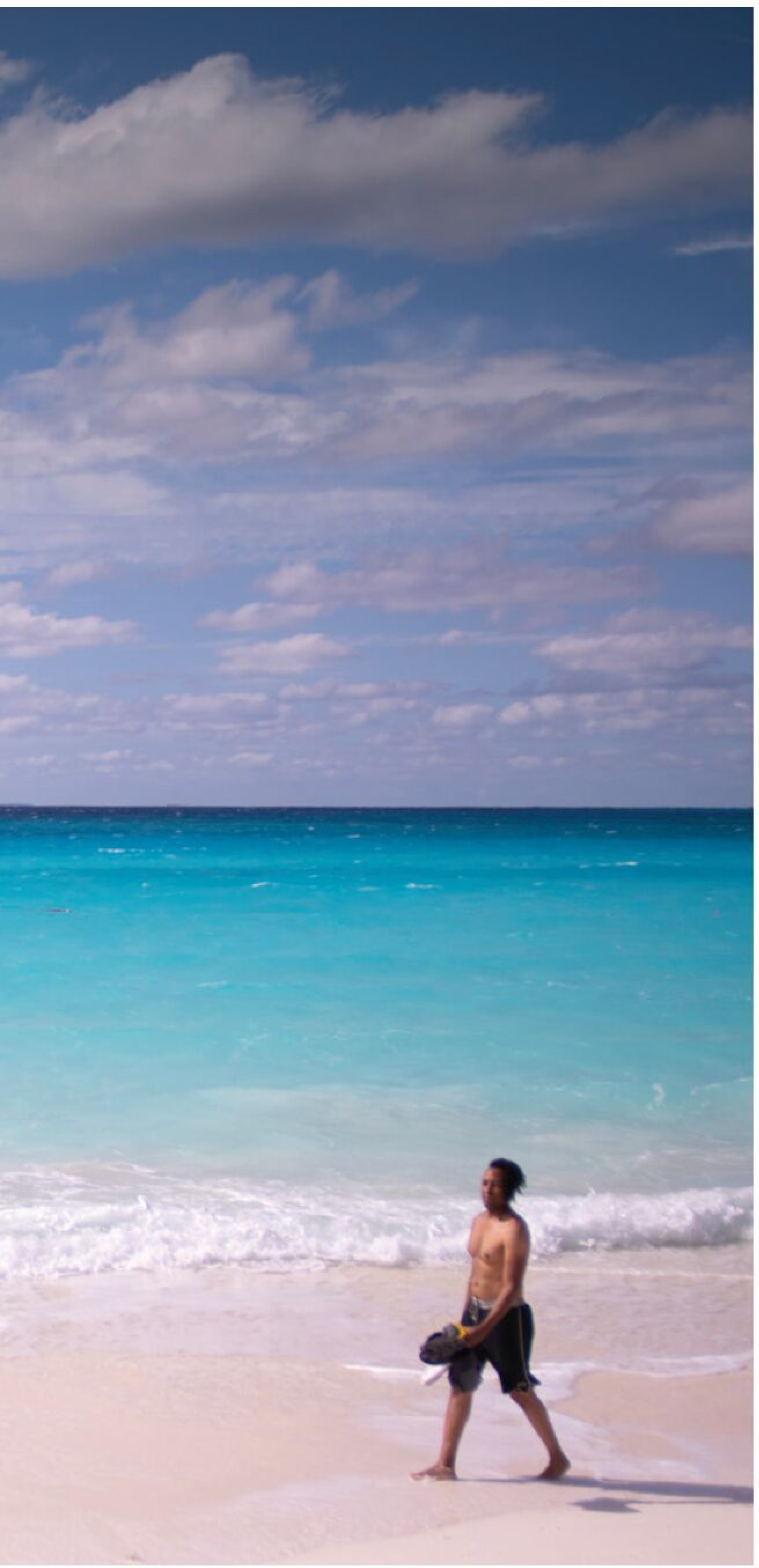
Equally impressive was Jonathan “Boogie” Long, whose reputation led to perhaps the largest number of the booked musicians sitting in his audience to witness him sing and play. Hector Anchondo, winner of both the 2020 Best Solo/Duo Award and the Memphis Cigar Box Award (for best guitarist) demonstrated how he earned those honors, and Tito Jackson shared songs from his recently released blues album. While all attendees were disappointed that Kenny Neal was unable to attend, they were soon excited about the unexpected opportunity to see his nephew, Tyree Neal, truly shine.

Blues Cruisers are regularly treated to Tommy Castro on every cruise, but it seemed extra special that he was joined by Deanna Bogart. And fans also got to witness Deanna and Vanessa Collier playing saxophone together with Castro’s band. In addition, it’s always fun to watch Albert Castiglia and Mike Zito play together because their exceptional talent is only matched by their great senses of humor. But the addition of Joanna Connor as a third master guitarist





Welcome to Chuk Barber's
SNAKE JAKE'S
New Orleans
christmas club lounge



made their collaborations extra special.

It was Daryl Davis' first blues cruise, and some attendees were stunned to learn that this talented pianist has also done extensive work bridging the gap between African-Americans and racists in the Ku Klux Klan. His workshop about breaking down racist barriers was well-attended, as was Bill Wax's talk about his years interviewing the Mayor of Bluesville, B.B. King.

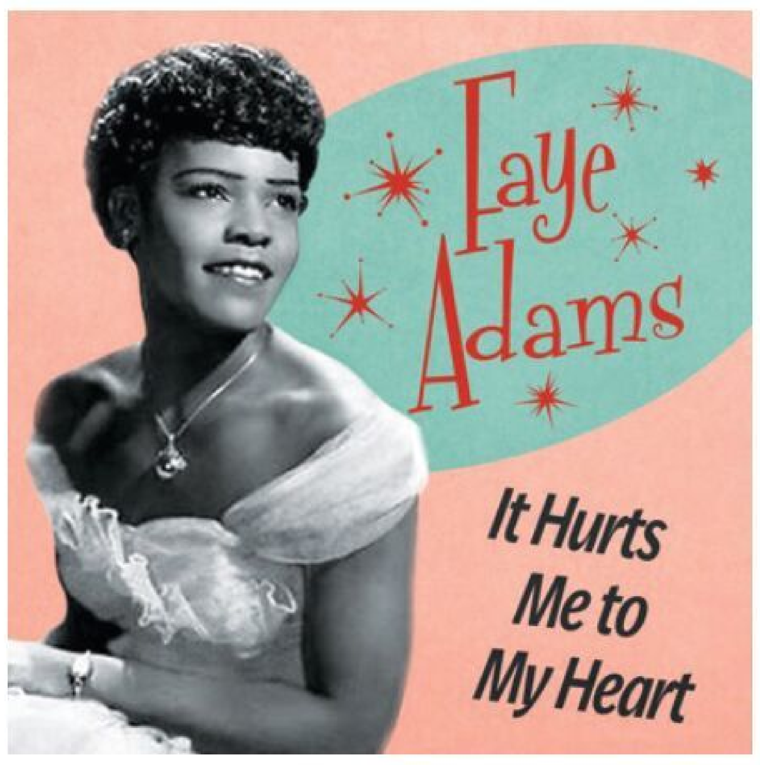
Of course, Curacao was quaint and inviting, and the beaches of Aruba were beautiful, but blues cruisers are mainly interested in the music. They were saddened to learn that Taj Mahal had suffered a serious dog bite injury that prevented him from playing his guitar. Luckily, however, Keb Mo was willing to not only play his own sets, but to join Taj Mahal as his guitarist. Keb Mo's calming demeanor was matched only by that of the sweet and soulful late-night host, Chuk Barber. Every night, cruisers were treated to jam sessions with unexpected visits by such favorites as Ronnie Baker Brooks and Billy Branch.

One of the best moments of Chuk Barber's Soul Lounge was when Tommy Castro channeled James Brown with his rendition of "Get On Up". One would think seven days of nearly non-stop music would be enough, but blues cruisers left the ship anxious to book themselves on the very next cruise.

PHENOMENAL BLUES WOMEN

by Dani Wilde

Little Richard once said, "the blues had an illegitimate baby and we named it rock n roll." Between 1949 and 1954, black and white music cultures collided to create this new and exciting genre which by 1955, was dominant in teen culture.



Elvis Presley may have been 'The King', but there were many other talented artists who paved the way for him, and Elvis often spoke of the Black Gospel and Blues musicians who shaped his sound and feel. Among his influences were phenomenal female musicians from Big Mama Thornton, who recorded 'Hound Dog' three years before Elvis, to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the gospel singer who played mean Rock n' Roll style lead guitar on her records in the 1930's, decades before Rock n Roll existed. As a boy, Elvis used to rush home from high school to listen to Tharpe on the radio! Of course, Elvis also had many male influences too such as Fats Domino and Big Joe Turner, who also helped to shape the very early stages of Rock n Roll, which was then still called Rhythm and Blues.

There was of course no one artist who created Rock n Roll. Covering the role women played, I've previously written pieces on Lavern Baker and Ruth Brown who of course had a huge impact and are still celebrated, albeit not enough, for their contributions. There are others, though, who over time have been somewhat forgotten, as is such with Rhythm and Blues Vocalist Faye Adams whom I'd like to talk about today...

Faye Adams was born Fanny Tuell in Newark, New Jersey, on May 22, 1923. Her Father David Tuell was a Gospel singer who invited her to sing and perform in church and on local radio shows with her sisters from the age of five.
"As long as I can remember, I was travelling around the country making appearances as a religious singer," Adam's recalled.

In the 1940's, under her married name of Faye Scruggs, she began performing Rhythm and Blues regularly in New York nightclubs. Faye was managed by her husband Tommy Scruggs, who helped her to build up a name for herself on the local scene and to perform in other States. It was at a show in Atlanta, Georgia, that Faye found her big break. Here she was discovered by none other than The Queen of R&,B Ruth Brown. Brown brought her friends, Count Basie and Marshall Royal, to see Faye Perform. Royal was particularly impressed and arranged for Faye to audition in front of bandleader Phil Moore, then known as the 'star-maker' for his help in providing musical coaching for many huge stars including Marilyn Monroe.
"Faye can really please the folks who like their blues with a beat. Not only that, I feel that she's going to develop into the top notch star in this bracket." Phil Moore, 1953.

Moore was incredibly connected and introduced Faye to Atlantic Records Band Leader Joe Morris. Morris encouraged Faye to take on the name 'Faye Adams' and, in 1952, signed her to a new record label 'Herald Records'. The following year, Faye Adam's single 'Shake a Hand,' composed by Morris, was released and was a HUGE success, holding the Number 1 spot on the U.S Billboard R&B chart for nine weeks.
It also reached number 22 in the Pop charts.

This was hugely significant because in the early 1950s, the Pop charts were dominated by white artists. It took the fabulous cross-over appeal of black artists such as Little Richard, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry and Ruth Brown to help to begin desegregating the pop chart, and America's music venues. The cross-over success of Adams' Shake a Hand precipitated the chart cross-over that was needed to break rock n roll into the mainstream by 1955! In an era of segregation and Jim Crow Laws, Rock n Roll would soon start to unite artists and fans of all races, for a shared love of the same great music.

Faye Adam's performance of Shake a Hand would become hugely influential to many Popular Rock n Roll artists. It was covered by the likes of Pat Boone (1957), Little Richard (1958), Laverne Baker (1960) and Elvis Presley (1975). Adams recognised that whilst her original version of Shake a hand had a fantastic, soulful, R&B sound, it was perhaps a little too gentle to be labelled 'Rock n Roll', and so she decided she would try to tap into the Rock n Roll market with her follow up releases.

"After cutting the record for 'Shake A Hand,' I decided to switch entirely to rock 'n roll." Faye Adams, Cleveland's Call and Post, 1957
In 1954, Adams released two more R&B singles It hurts me to my heart and I'll be True, which both topped the R&B Chart. I'll be True would be covered by Bill Hayley that same year and by Jackie DeShannon three years later. During this time, Adams left Morris' band and billed herself as 'Atomic Adams'. Cleveland Disc Jockey Alan Freed, who was hugely responsible for popularising the Rock n Roll genre, often played Adams records on the radio alongside other first wave rock n roll artists. He described Adams as the "little gal with the big voice," and she toured the 'Rhythm and Blues Show Tours' alongside The Drifters.

New York's Lackawanna Leader newspaper noted that Adams was "being called the female counterpart of Fats Domino", with whom she had shared the bill with on more than one occasion. Her depth of tone and emotion along with her vocal phrasing, note choices and New-Orleans style piano accompaniment drew many similarities with Domino. Adams had a lot of power in her voice, which was ornamented with a raspiness that really hammered home the emotion of her lyric. Not only was her music a pre-cursor to rock n roll but also to the soul music genre that would become hugely popular by the 1960s. The Acoustic Music organization, identified that the "first clear evidence of soul music shows up with the '5 Royales', an ex-gospel group that turned to R&B and in Faye Adams, whose "Shake A Hand" becomes an R&B standard".

In 1955, Adams was featured in the 'Rhythm and Blues Revue' film alongside some huge stars including Nat King Cole, Sarah Vaughan and Big Joe Turner. She continued to be in great company when in 1957 she signed to Imperial Records, who also represented Fats Domino. By the end of the decade, though, her success began to wane, and by 1963 she had retired from the music industry.

Faye Adams' significant musical contributions were somewhat forgotten until in 1998, she received a 'Pioneer Award' from the Rhythm and Blues Foundation, recognising that her music opened the door to Rock n Roll. At the time she was reported to be living in the UK. It is not known whether Adams is still alive; there have been no obituaries for her in the music press, and yet if she were still alive, she would now be 98 years old - How I'd love to be able to hand her a copy of this article and to thank her for her wonderful music!

If you're not already a Faye Adams fan, I highly recommend you check out "FAYE ADAMS - THE SINGLES 1953-1956" a compilation of her best work which was released on Jasmine Records and features 28 of Adam's Rhythm and Blues tracks which paved the way for Rock n Roll!

THE ROOT OF ALL

When Veteran musician Tom Paley took to the stage at New York's Carnegie Hall in February 2016, he was in reality completing an extraordinary musical circle, a journey that had taken him from his native New York to London via Scandinavia and Sweden, but which in a way was significantly symbolized by his return to that New York stage as a leading part of the Lead Belly Festival.

by **Iain Patience** Images: **as credited**

Also on the New York that February was Eric Burden, a guy with a firm footing in the music, likewise another elder statesman of the blues, Buddy Guy. Both musicians with a blues pedigree and impressive history to match.

Tom Paley by Les Ong

But with Paley, you had the real deal. When I last met with him a few years ago, then eighty-eight years old, Paley had actually played with Lead Belly himself, and was the sole performer who had such a claim to fame, being the last remaining musician alive to have actually played with the legendary, towering twelve-string bluesman, Huddie Ledbetter. Few, if any, could stake a greater claim to take the stage given this remarkable fact.

Based in London, where he lived and played from the mid-60s, Paley remained undimmed in his passion for roots and acoustic music generally, popping up around the capital to play gigs and take-part in open mic-type sessions in many London folk clubs. I caught up with him at one of his favorite haunts, Sharp's Folk Club, held each Tuesday evening in what is probably the UK's foremost folk-music resource centre, Cecil Sharp House in London's Regents Park area. Here, Paley was clearly a much admired and well-known figure with an acknowledged mastery of roots music.

Asked if he still enjoyed the life of a gigging

At the Royal Albert Hall for Leadbelly Fest 2015 by Les Ong

musician, he confirmed: “I still enjoy it, getting out and about. I love music, so it’s always an interesting pleasure,” he confirmed: “At these kind of clubs, you never know who might turn up, good or bad.”

Then nearing ninety, Paley was happy to reminisce about his time in 1950s and early-60s New York where he rubbed shoulders with many genuinely legendary figures as both an equal and a tutor-mentor.
“I got to know Lead Belly because a buddy of mine looked him up in the local phone directory. So we went along to his place and he was friendly and happy to let us play alongside him. He clearly understood racial issues even back then, which was understandable, I suppose, given his background. And he always dressed real smart, creased trousers/pants, shirt and waistcoat. It made him a bit of an exception at that time,” Paley joked.

But to have both met and played with Lead Belly is barely the beginning of Paley’s extraordinary musical journey. The same buddy who tracked down the great bluesman also traced another legendary roots music figure – Woody Guthrie.

“I got on real well with Woody. I’d go over to his place regularly on Mermaid Avenue – never forgotten the address – and we’d play together, laugh and talk. Eventually, Woody asked if I’d like to go out and play with him. I did, of course. Woody was great fun, a real easy-going sort of guy, though he could be a bit abrasive at times. And he could be unreliable, if he’d been drinking,” he recalled with a roll of the shoulders and a chuckle.

Paley & Son by Laurie Lewis

"Pete Seeger was also around," he added. "Pete had a sort of basement apartment in the Village, and I'd often end up there playing with him. Politics was often a topic, too. And many others would pass through Pete's place when in town."

Paley also remembered meeting up with North Carolina's country-cross-picking master, Doc Watson: "I remember Doc coming up to play in New York. He was a real nice guy. And, boy, could he pick a guitar."

He met Dylan just as his career was about to take-off: "I was introduced to Bob by the guy who was running the Folklore Centre in the Village, Izzy Young, (the guy who gave David Bromberg and Bob Dylan their first professional gigs and worked with Gary Davis, Dave Van Ronk and countless others) or as I know him 'Young Izzy' – he's a week younger than me and we went to school together. I remember he introduced Bob as being a guy who had either just cut, or was about to cut, his first album. I think I wished him good luck, but I never met him again," he said. Dylan is, in fact, an admirer of Paley and mentions this in his autobiographical memoir, Chronicle.

Another guy Paley knew when he was in New York back then developed into possibly one of the greatest guitarists – and certainly slide guitarists ever: "I gave guitar lessons to a young kid, Ry Cooder, back then. I didn't do any of that slide stuff, though I sometimes played a Dobro. I taught him the basic picking stuff. He was a real eager learner, another nice guy. We had some good times together." Paley also taught Happy Traum his version of "Railroad Bill", a version Traum still admires and plays today, while helping Jerry Garcia get to grips with the guitar and the music.

Paley also played the famed Lead Belly Memorial Concert in New York's Town Hall. Held in January 1950, following Lead Belly's death, Paley recalled many unexpected musicians also turned up to take part in the tribute event. "It was one of those bills that kept changing. In truth, you never knew who was actually going to be there on the night and some simply turned up to do a spot. I remember the Reverend being one of those (Reverend Gary Davis)," he smiled, before adding that he personally considered Gary Davis – whom he always refered to by his full title, 'The Reverend' – and Blind Blake to have been the two greatest acoustic pickers ever. Others on the bill that evening included Brownie McGhee, Woody Guthrie, WC Handy and Pete Seeger, in an event initially organized by blues music recorder-historian Alan Lomax.

Paley, who first recorded in 1953, moved to Stockholm for a few years in around 1962, leaving the USA on the brink of the Vietnam years and partly, at least, due to pressure from one of his oldest musical partners, Mike Seeger: "I was playing with the New Lost City Ramblers then. We were pretty successful, with a few records cut and plenty of gigs, though we didn't call them gigs back then, we called them 'bookings.' I was always left-wing and the band was viewed as a radical outfit, I guess. The CIA/FBI approached me. At that time the Senator Joseph McCarthy witch-hunts were underway and I was asked to 'help', in other words to 'spy' on my fellow musicians for them. I refused. I was then threatened basically, and told I'd have to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee and give evidence. Again, I refused."

"Slowly, over the next year or so, many of our gigs dried up. It became more and more difficult to find work. Eventually, Mike Seeger, who had no political affiliation in reality, blamed me for this and more or less asked me to leave. So I did. We moved to Stockholm, which was welcome and open at the time. But after a few years, we moved to London. That would have been around 1965. I already knew Peggy Seeger having met her a few times in New York. She was then married to one of the leading folk musicians and songwriters in the UK, Ewan McColl. Peggy suggested there would be some work for me in the UK, so I moved over and met up with her and Ewan."

Nowadays,with Paley, then an elderly statesman of roots music in general with a lifelong love of old-fashioned folk music., sadly gone, his version of blues-classic 'Sporting Life Blues'' on YouTube is a reminder of just how accomplished he was as a bluesman.

In reality, however, he played guitar, banjo and fiddle with equal ease and confidence, though found arthritis a limiting factor towards the end of his life. When time allowed, he also played with his son, Ben Paley; the pair released a joint album – Paley & Son – which also featured Welsh singer, now BBC Radio 2 Blues Show presenter Cerys Matthews on a couple of tracks. When I joked with Tom about Cerys coming to his album as Wales via Nashville, Paley laughed at the thought and hinted at knowing little about her, in reality.

Turning once more to his gig at New York's Lead Belly Fest I recall, he was clearly perplexed by some of the guys on the bill, none of whom worked with or personally knew Lead Belly himself. Eric Burden merited a mere nod of the head, a minor acknowledgement. But Buddy Guy – an electric player with more than a few years on the clock, like Paley himself – received a mere shrug of the shoulders and raised eyebrows. I had to explain who Buddy Guy is to Paley, his involvement with blues music and friendship/links with B.B. King, before it even seemed to register. "I couldn't figure out who these guys were and why they were there. They didn't seem to have much connection to Lead Belly, far as I could see," he laughed, sharing a strangely self-evident truth.

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NEVER BEEN TO MEMPHIS BUT BLUES FEELS LIKE HOME TO ME

by **Rowland Jones** Images: **Supplied**

It was early 2007 and my wife Lesley and I were about to move to Italy; my intention was to get involved in the flourishing Blues scene there. I was trying to write an arrangement of 'The thrill is gone.' inspired by a version by Zachary Breaux but as it developed I became keen on the idea of creating a new song – yes, writing an original blues.

I'd been involved in writing songs before but it had always been as part of a band in a group effort or kind of co-assembling a song, using my music and someone else's lyrics but this time, this would be my song. Here was the problem. I'm a Brit living in South Manchester and about to move to Italy. How much further from the blues can you get? The closest thing I get to picking cotton balls is flossing my teeth and I didn't even own a stall for another mule to be kicking in! At this point, I remembered a radio programme where the interviewer had asked Chris Rea about the idea that 'white men couldn't sing the blues'. His response was precise and concise, AND probably the only time I've heard the word 'bollocks' on Radio Four. So, with this thought in mind, I began to write my first Blues.

My first thoughts were relating to what I wasn't in terms of being a 'Bluesman' and trust me there were many … and out they came 'I've never been to Memphis,
Never been to Tennessee.' 'Never been on the killing floor, Never picked a bale.' I included every blues cliche I could except 'Woke up this morning' which I felt had already been parodied sufficiently, and anyway this was not meant to be a parody, it was my take on the Blues. I was

pretty pleased with my first effort.
(from 'I've Never Been to Memphis') OK it does mention waking in the morning, but only a bit...

'Never been to Memphis, never been to Tennessee

Never been to Memphis, never been to Tennessee

But I've been down to the crossroads, and everybody pass by me.

I ain't no Delta bluesman, can't tell a nickel from a dime

I ain't no Delta bluesman, can't tell a nickel from a dime

But I've woken early in the morning and found dead cats on the line.

He has got a mojo, and a Johnny conkeroo

He's the hoochie coochie man, who'll put a voodoo boogie on you

I said good morning blues, won't you ever set me free?.

Though I've never been to Memphis, the blues feels like home to me.

Never been on the killing floor, never picked a bale

But I've been where the thrill is gone and felt that hell-hound on my trail

I said good morning blues; have mercy; hear my plea!

Though I've never been to Memphis, the blues feels like home to me.'

A short while after arriving in Italy, I was invited to sit in with an embryonic blues band. I suddenly realised, as the only English speaker in the band, I was also expected to sing and front it. By some bizarre quirk of fate, I just happened to have these lyrics in my guitar case and suddenly I was a frontman – very happy and somewhat surprised at the promotion. Ironically, because I was singing to an audience that didn't have English as a first language, it meant that I was probably under less close scrutiny than I would have been in front of a UK audience. This was just as well as I found playing the multiple role of singer/guitarist/frontman somewhat challenging at first, especially presenting the band in a foreign language. As a consequence, on numerous occasions I'd sing, say 'you and me' when it should have been 'me and you', and I quickly developed the technique of garbling a spontaneously re-written line which ended with the correct sound to rhyme with my mistake.

Having begun to settle into my new role, I threw myself into creating my own repertoire, safe in that knowledge that most of the audience would not understand what I was singing anyway, something that gave me a substantial safety net! One of my next attempts to create original blues was 'True True Blues' where I adopted the age old technique of writing a story of hardship, but still with reference to the idea of not being a Bluesman.

'Not born in the windy city
Not travelled down Route 66
Wanna play the blues guitar
You got the chords, you got the licks
Your woman has treated you badly
Your friends have let you down
You lost your job a second time
Got no money to hit the town
'Got that feeling, I've paid my dues,
Bad bad feeling,
I've got the true true blues.'

(from 'True True Blues')

Another device I used in my writing was to refer to some of the genuine Blues guys!

'Don't want be faster than Slowhand,
Clearer than Muddy
More regal than the Kings
Friendlier than Buddy
Don't want anything much
I just want to play the Blues'

(from 'I just want to play the blues')

Many of my songs followed the traditional themes: good love, gone bad; and bad luck in general but I did become even more adventurous in my lyrics. I love quotes and I had come across a quote by Nietzsche, that well-known but often misspelled philosopher, who said, 'If a man has a why then he can survive and bear anything.'

On that basis I wrote 'Where's the Why?' – the story of a lonely soul looking for a partner:

'You might be tall and slender
with long blonde hair,
You might be reet petite - I don't really care
As long as your mind works and your heart is true
I don't care if your eyes are green, brown or blue.'
Where's the why? Where's the you?'

To be honest I rarely mention the source of this inspiration for fear of sounding pretentious. However, I don't feel so bad, since I discovered that Nietzsche also said 'That which does not kill us makes us stronger.' – a phrase that has been done to death by self-help gurus, management consultants and philosophical songwriters across the globe!

Again, following a tradition in the Blues, I couldn't resist trying to inject a little bit of humour into my lyrics. In the Leon Redbone inspired 'Am I feeling Blue' the protagonist complains that 'My baby's gone cold on me, But her sister has not!,' a variation on the Red House punchline, whilst 'Better give it up' combines two common themes in the Blues – Doctors and drinking.

'I was almost sober when I saw the Doc
With lunch I'd just had a flagon
He looked me in the eye; said 'Sorry it's the drink '
I said "I'll come back when you're on the wagon.'
(from 'Better Give It Up')

So, had I overcome my 'fear' of being accused of lacking authenticity? Well maybe, but there were still other issues – not so much to do with the attitude and the feeling but to do with the American nature of Blues lyrics. To be more precise let me give you an example. In the 70's, I was playing in what you would probably describe as a country rock band. In one of our early songs, Jon, the writer, had written 'We got to Matlock just before the break of day'. You see what I mean? It just doesn't fit well. Sammy Cahn, who knew a thing or two about song-writing, talks about the sing-ability of words in lyrics but I feel that there is another element that counts – something a sociologist might call cultural congruency but I'll call making it fit.

For example: places to refer to:
New York? Yes.
Dallas? Yes.
Swansea? No.

Cars to feature:
Cadillac? Yes.
Chevy? Yes.
Cortina? No.
(unless you have the comic genius of Ian Dury).

I'm not sure that Jon and I ever saw eye to eye on 'Matlock' but suffice it to say that our best songs were Los Angeles and Ain't gonna catch me again – the first, a song about a city we'd never been to and the second, a cowboy story about an outlaw (who did shoot the sheriff) so, in the end, I think we went along with tradition.

Of course, aspiration to the 'foreign = exotic' has always been there in popular songwriting. Chattanooga choo-choo? Yes Chattanooga - a place a resident once described to me as being like Crewe. Herb Alpert called his band The Tijuana brass with a certain amount of irony given that at that time it was notoriously violent. Of course, the fantasy can work the other way, too. I was in a studio in New York and I remarked on the Manchester-built mixing desk. The engineer commented, 'Trafford Park - sounds beautiful' - a description I felt that I should clarify rapidly, in case it became his fantasy holiday destination.

So there's one more element to consider – the grammar. I can honestly say that in conversation I've never said 'Ain't' never said 'Gonna' and above all never used the term 'Baby' to apply to anything other than well . . . a baby. Yet we do it in songs all the time. . . or at least, I do. And so I shall continue to write my songs using words like Cadillac and gasoline and referencing New York City and Tennessee (but having said that I've also included 'Descartes' and 'equilibrium' in lyrics...)

So, what conclusion can I draw from these ramblings? Am I guilty of writing the blues when I've never had the hard life of the southern states and not even been there until recently? Well, I look at it like this: songs are essentially stories and I don't think anybody has ever criticised Agatha Christie for never having been involved in a murder investigation (or been a murderer, for that matter) and though I am CLEARLY NOT making any direct comparison, Shakespeare never visited Italy yet he wrote convincingly about Venice and Verona. Just saying...

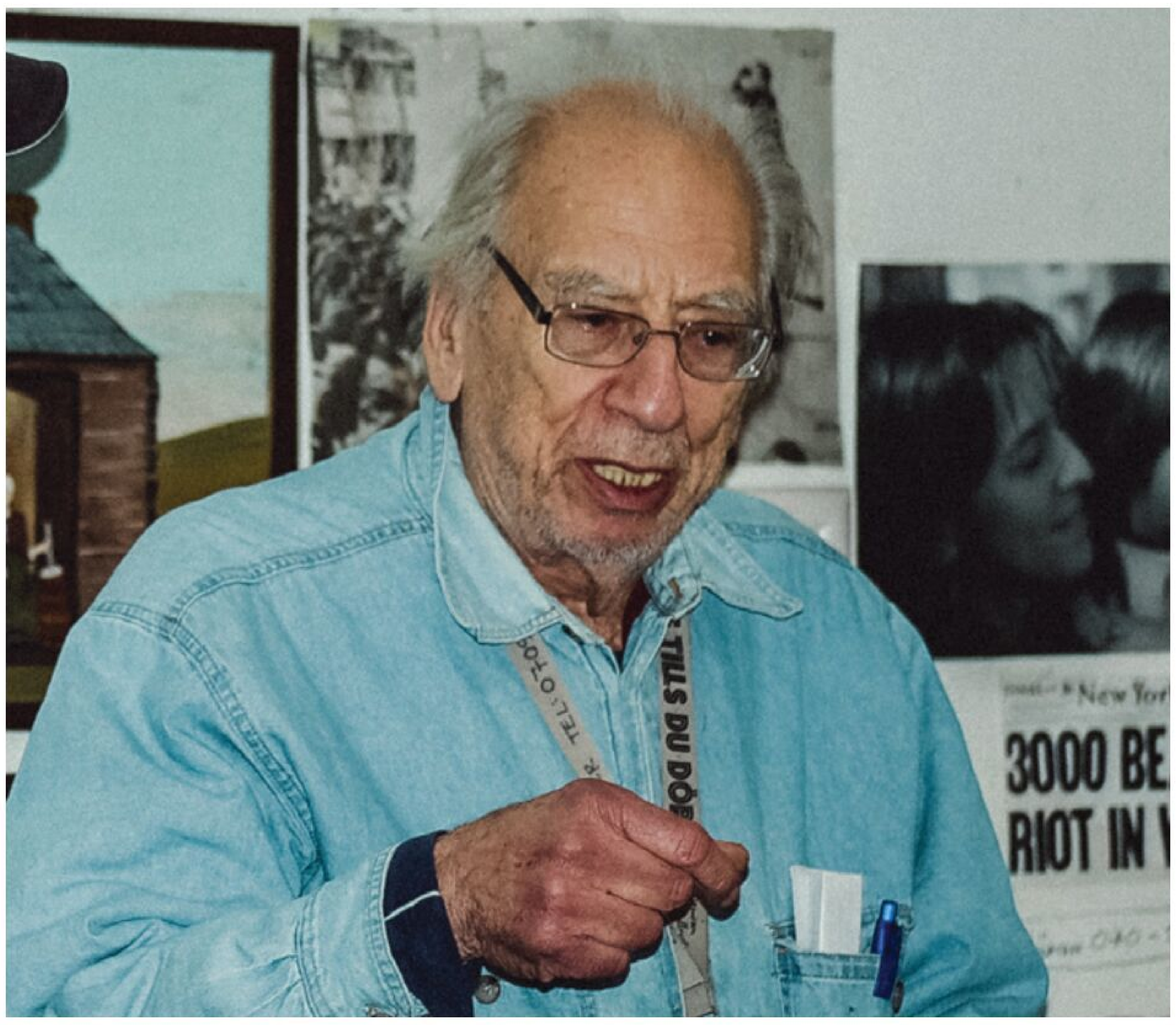
Rowland Jones is a singer/songwriter and guitarist based in South Manchester. His recent imaginatively titled album 'Rowland Jones - Live' was recorded at The Great British Rock and Blues Festival in Skegness in Jan 2020 and was nominated in the Best Live CD category in The 2021 Independent Blues Awards. He also presents talkingsongs.uk a weekly on-line programme where he talks with other songwriters such as Dana Gillespie, When Rivers Meet, Rachelle Coba, Steve Ferbrache (The Achievers). On-line since June 2020, he has interviewed around 70 songwriters from UK, New York, Nashville, Miami, Portland, Canada, Australia, and Italy with a total of over 140,000 viewers.

www.rowlandjonesmusic.com
talkingsongs.uk

BACK IN THE DAY

IZZY YOUNG

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Jan Venning**

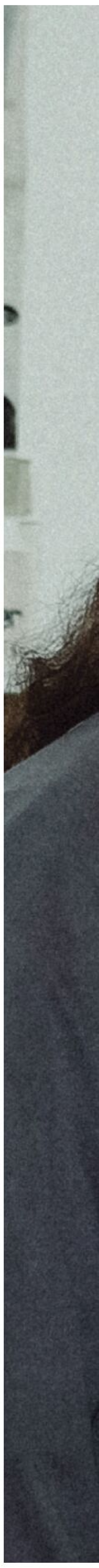


Izzy Young was one of those guys, as I joked with him a few years ago, a central pillar, part of the US New YorkJewish music mafia: fortunately he laughed at the thought. The man who gave his life to folk and roots music, finally passed his last go-round, aged 90, in Stockholm, Sweden, where he'd been resident for around 40 years, since leaving New York in the early 1970s.

Widely recognized as the man who gave an ambitious young Bob Dylan his first professional gig in New York in 1961, he remained a close friend of Dylan's through the decades, as Dylan acknowledges in his memoir, Chronicle. But Israel Goodman Young was more than just a part of Dylan's historic rise; he set David Bromberg on the road to solo fame, and encouraged countless others along the way, including Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Rory Block, Happy Traum, John Sebastian, Joni Mitchell, Dave Van Ronk, Tim Buckley, Tom Paxton, Rev Gary Davis, Stefan Grossman, and almost everyone of note in the exploding early '60s New York music scene. This was a man with an ear for great music.

David Bromberg once told me that it was Izzy who first gave him the confidence to strike out on a solo musician career following a gig, a move that was to change the guy's life profoundly.

His Folklore Center on Greenwich Village's legendary MacDougall Street (number 58) was the place to go for all of those itinerant and hopeful musicians back in the day. And Izzy took them all to his heart. His voice was always full-tilt, with opinions flying fast and furious at all times. He was a true music legend who never played an instrument himself, a rare achievement indeed.
When I last sat down and chatted with him at



his Folklore Centrum in Stockholm in 2016, Dylan had just been awarded the Nobel prize for literature and Izzy's phone was clanging non-stop with media interview requests, a thought he found hilarious, as he pithily commented on the fact the "….cocks****rs, mother******s, won't buy anything here!" But passers-by peered in his windows, eager to have just a glimpse of one of modern music's most important supporters. The late US musician, Tom Paley, of the New Lost City Ramblers, was a peer of Young. Reared and raised in the same corner of New York, they attended school together and were separated by a mere two weeks or so in age: Paley always joked that he called Izzy Young, 'young Izzy,' a memory that I shared with Young who smiled at the thought before firing off another cuss-filled observation about the state of modern music.

An elemental force, with an opinion on just about everything, Izzy Young will be a hard act to follow—we won't see his likes again, I fear. And for all of us who had the good-fortune to know and meet the man, there will be a memory to hold, a thought to cherish and an understanding of the honor it was to have shared some time with Izzy Young.

VIRTUAL BLUES

by Adam Kennedy

It's the start of a New Year, and there's already a stunning list of new blues albums on the horizon. Presented here in the latest instalment of Virtual Blues are some of the artists that could potentially be releasing new material during 2022 and a whole lot more.

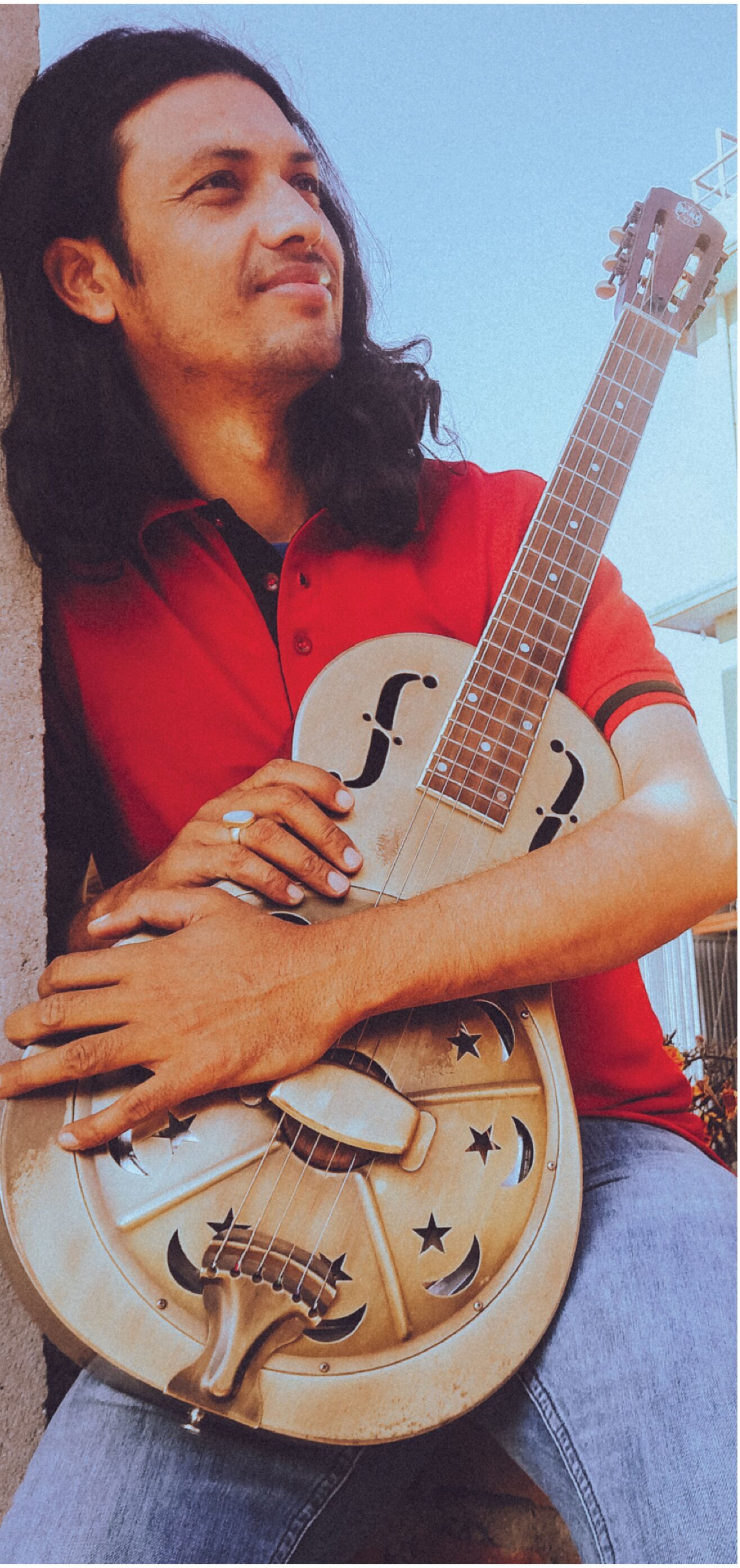
BERNARD ALLISON

(Minnesota, USA)

Bernard Allison recently reunited with long-time collaborator/legendary producer Jim Gaines at the Bessie Blue Studios in Tennessee. Spurred on by the downtime brought about by the pandemic, Allison was invigorated to channel his all into his new album. Bernard's latest offering is titled 'Highs And Lows'. Speaking about the title track of the album in a recent social media posting, the artist said that: "It's a part of life, the ups and downs that everyone deals with." You can read more about the artist's forthcoming release in this issue's interview with the man himself. Bernard Allison's new album 'Highs And Lows' will be released via Ruf Records on February 25th.

(Philadelphia, USA)

US-based blues-rocker Katie Henry is getting ready to release the follow-up to her critically acclaimed debut album 'High Road'. The New Jersey originating artist fast became a favourite on the New York live circuit, whilst receiving comparisons to legends such as Bonnie Raitt and Janis Joplin. Henry's sophomore release was recorded in May 2021 at Brooklyn's Degraw Sound and produced by Ben Rice. Speaking about her new album, the artist said: "We recorded the album live during the pandemic," reflects Katie, "and it was so fun to be able to record in a room with people after feeling isolated for such a long time. The majority of the album was recorded live, and I love that feeling. It's like capturing lightning in a bottle." Katie Henry's new album 'On My Way' features ten original songs and will be released via Ruf Records on the 28th of January.



PRAKASH SLIM

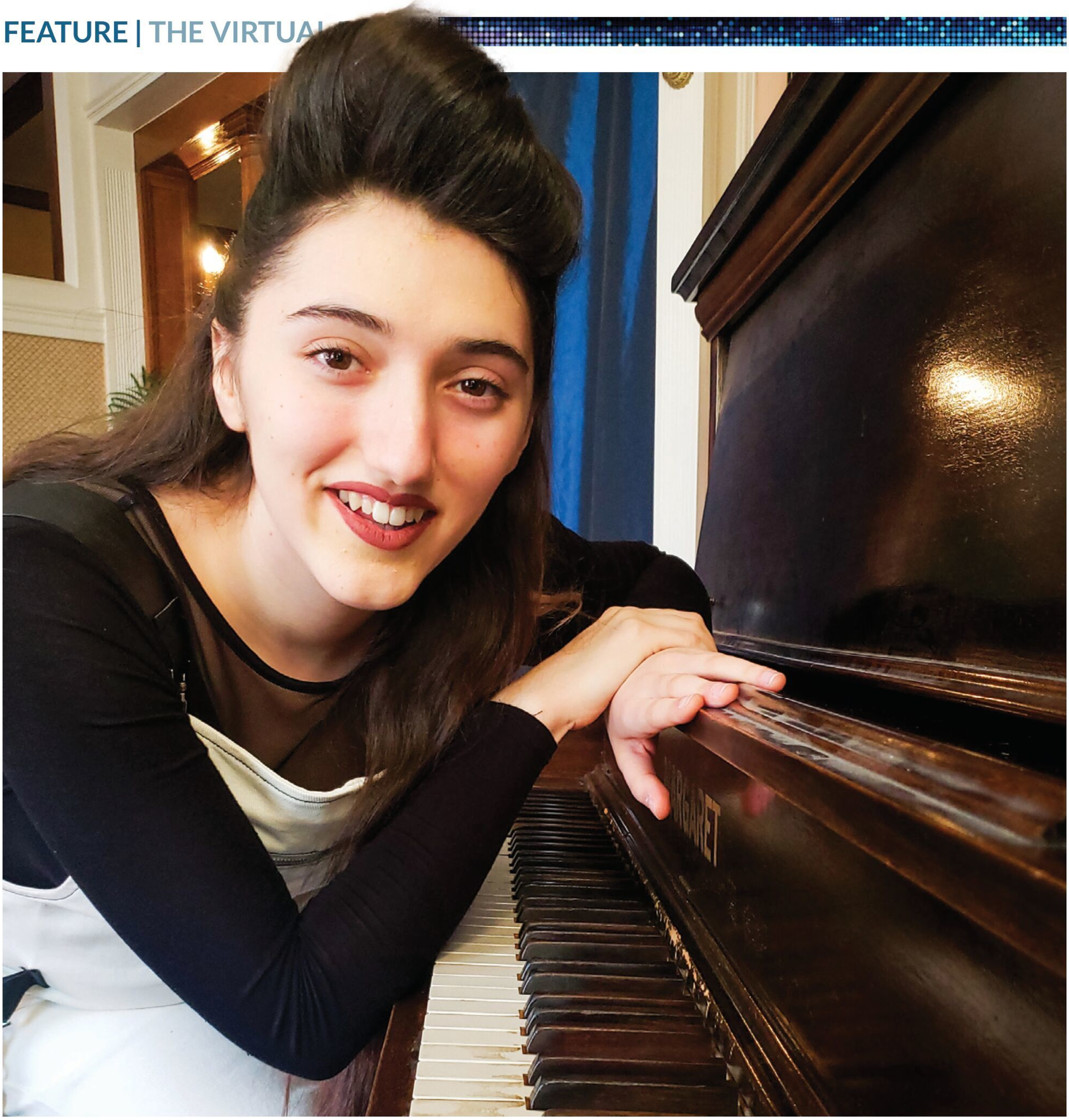
(Kathmandu, Nepal)

If you've been following the pages of Virtual Blues in recent months, you may recollect Nepalese bluesman Prakash Slim. The traditional blues artist is pictured here smiling, and rightly so – as, after all of his hard work and international collaborations, the release of his debut album is now in sight. For those interested in finding out more about Prakash Slim and his Nepalese twist on delta blues, visit his social media pages. The artist is presently trying to raise funds for the release of his new album 'Country Blues From Nepal' via a crowdfunding campaign on Indiegogo.com.

VANEESE THOMAS

(Memphis, USA)

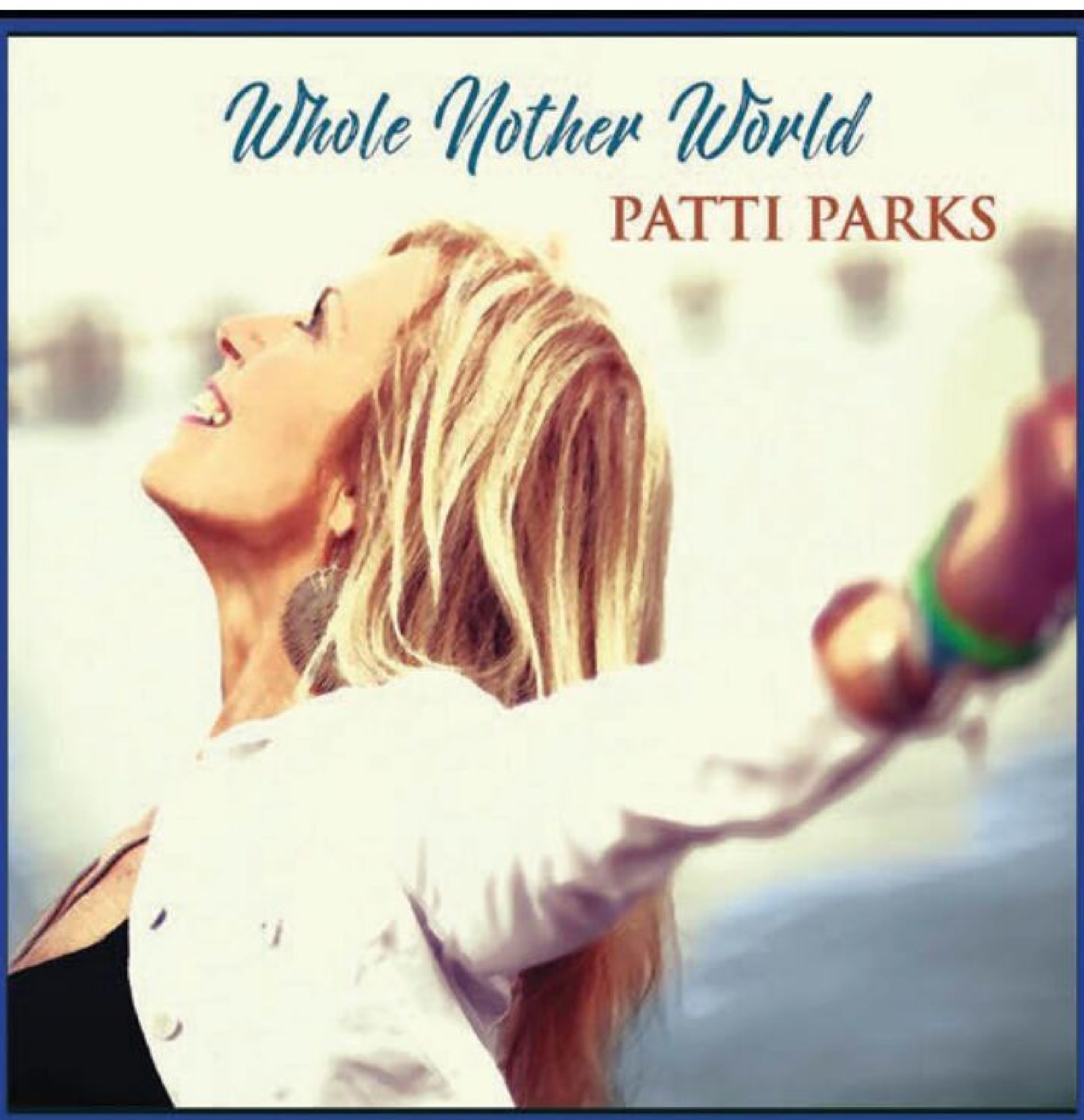
Vaneese Thomas recently signed to Blue Heart Records. The artist is following her family's soul and blues legacy and plans to unveil her new album in 2022. Vaneese is pictured here in downtown Memphis between Beale Street and Rufus Thomas Blvd - the street named after her legendary father. Thomas performed in Memphis shortly before Christmas as part of The Black Opry Revue alongside artists such as The Reverend Shawn Amos, Tylar Bryant, Jet Holden, Roberta Lea, Toni Mack, and Lizzie No. In attendance at the performance was none other than Vaneese's sister Carla Thomas, who famously appeared on the Stax Records classic "Tramp" alongside the late great Otis Redding. Look out for more news about Vaneese's forthcoming new album in the coming months.



VERONICA LEWIS

(Boston, USA)

New England's Veronica Lewis had a stellar year during 2021. The breakthrough artist reached the dizzy heights of the tops of both the Billboard and iTunes blues album charts with her debut album 'You Ain't Unlucky'. Subsequently, Lewis amassed over a million streams and views over her respective YouTube, Spotify, and Facebook channels. In 2021 Veronica Lewis deservedly picked up the Blues Blast '2021 Sean Costello Rising Star Award' and the '2021 New Artist Debut Album Award'. If that wasn't enough, the artist rounded out the year as being recognised as having the 'Top Blues Song For The Year 2021' on the Roots Music Report – and all this at just the age of 18. Impressive additions to the young artist's already glowing resume. A bright future beckons for Veronica Lewis. To find out more about the artist, please visit Veronica's social media channels via linktr.ee/veronicalewisblues



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JON SLIDEWELL & THE REEDCUTTERS

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From the ashes of good time R&B band JP and the Razors comes the bar room swaggering old skool R&B and blues of Jon Slidewell and the Reedcutters.
Between 2017-19 as JP and the Razors, they first released a 7 song mini-LP called 'Let the good times roll' that featured seven classic Blues and R&B covers by the likes of Willie Dixon, Elmore James, Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley – This release brought much positive attention from magazines like Blues Matters, Blues Blast and Rock n Reel.
Then in mid-2019, they released an EP called 'Four songs from the house'. All four songs were self-penned by Jonny and featured the lead guitar talents of the then 16-year-old Jake Poole. This release further raised the band's profile and they were subsequently featured on a Rock n Reel compilation CD
But then the combination of a rushed failed – never to be commercially released LP, then the sad tragic death of the band's original drummer – Ross 'Razor' Crichton (RIP 24/12/19 – shine on soul brother x). Jake going off to university and of course, the 'Pandemic' – all left the band in a state of limbo...
But vocalist/guitarist Jonny never stopped writing Blues related songs – and as a tribute to his old Drummer Jonny compiled and released a demo of 14 self-penned songs under the band's old name - simply 'the Razors'.
This CD was meant to be a purely 'one off' demo release for folk who knew or had met Ross.
But Blues Matters journalists – Stephen Harrison and John Mitchell picked up on it, and it received an unexpected great review in Blues Matters. This in turn spurred the band to get back together!
Lead guitarist Jake agreed to help out when he could and the band invited old guitarist DB Williams back into the fold.
Throughout late 2020 and well into 2021 Jonny ducked and dived in and out of the studio when possible, plus making full use of his old Tascam 4 track to record tracks 'Low Fi'
In the late summer of 2021, the band played two sets at the Stockport Blues festival and went down a storm!
After this Jonny and studio engineer Leigh Eaton worked hard putting songs together and along with the Tascam Porta studio recordings, there is now enough material for a full band LP. It will be called 'One more for the Road' and will feature 13 songs written by Jonny and one cover by Willie Dixon.
They wear their influences on their hearts – The deep south of Son House, the cool blues of BB King, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf - The gritty slide of Elmore James and the good time R&B fun and menace of John Lee Hooker, Hound Dog Taylor and George Thorogood. Also not forgetting Lightin' Hopkins, Buddy Guy, Rory Gallagher, Junior Kimborough and the Black Keys. Watch out for the LP in 2022!

DIONNE BENNETT

www.dionnebennett.com

When you first experience the British Jamaican singer-songwriter, producer, and radio personality Dionne Bennett, the word that immediately comes to mind is powerhouse.

It is little wonder producer, songwriter and artist Little G Weevil assembled a muscular wrecking crew of the finest Hungarian musicians for her new album Sugar Hip Ya Ya released on Hunnia Records, Receiving critical acclaim worldwide, the album charted at #1 on both the Roots Music Report UK and Soul Blues charts, as well as charting in the UK, France, and Australia.

Dionne is internationally known for her unique and diverse vocal style that covers all Afro-culture influenced genres from blues, jazz, R&B, soul, reggae, drum bass funk, rock 'n' roll, and beyond. During her career she has performed throughout Europe and has shared the stage with music legends such as Dr. John. She has also opened for Maceo Parker and the British super group Oasis, as one of the members of the 'The Peth' fronted by Welsh actor, producer, and singer Rhys Ifans.

She has released singles with renowned jazz pianist, Jason Rebello, Grammy award winner saxophonist, Tim Garland, and rock bands such as Super Furry Animals and The Earth. Dionne also starred as a 'Bluette' in the official Blues Brothers Musical.

Dionne has had a varied career path within the arts and was part of a Cbeebies educational program called the Bobinogs that used music and song to educate and inform preschoolers. She also presented the BBC program 'The Maths Channel,' another program for young school children to educate and solve math problems using music and song. She is also a vocal and performance university lecturer, who coaches the next generation of up-and-coming singers on the music scene and at degree level. Dionne hosts and produces her own music show 'The Suga Shack' for Radio Cardiff, UK. She is the chair of a grassroots music organization 'Ladies of Rage.' Dionne also chairs the Diversity Advisory Group at the Royal College of Music Drama, helping to ensure the inclusion of black music and black artists within the curriculum and the college itself.

Despite health issues and raising a family, her love and desire to sing and perform has never been lost and she continues to work, play, perform, and record music. Says Metronome in the US, "catch Dionne Bennett as soon as you can.... She's a beautiful shooting star."

HUGHES TAYLOR

hughestaylormusic.com

Hughes Taylor puts his own spin on 21st Century Blues. Weaving influences of icons like Hendrix, Vaughan, and Clapton with elements of Muscle Shoals, Stax, vintage southern rock and more, he forges his own trail to impressive results. Modern Nostalgia, his fourth studio album, sees the singer-guitarist (who's still in his 20s) really beginning to flex his musical muscles. "In some ways it's a concept album," he notes. "The title sums up the unifying thread that weaves through all the tracks; tapping into classic styles but doing it in a modern way." He goes on to explain how he was exposed to the blues at an early age. "When I was 12 or 13 a friend of my father turned me on to Clapton. I had already been messing around with basic chords on guitar for a few years at that point but, once I heard that, and then Stevie Ray Vaughan, I dove into the blues and there was no turning back. From the moment I would get home from school, every day, I wouldn't put the guitar down. I would even wake up in the middle of the night and realize I'd fallen asleep playing. Being predominantly self-taught, and playing everything by ear, encouraged me to be versatile and unrestricted. I let the music take me where it wants to go, and I feel each note in my soul. That's what led me to start writing my own songs." He started recording those originals in his parents' basement after buying recording gear for his 14th birthday. He was also honing his live skills, playing with anyone who would have him—any time.

"I was in my first official band when I was 14 or 15, but it was essentially a cover band. Soon after that, I realized I had a clear vision of what I wanted. So by the time I could legally drive, I was performing under my own name with literally whomever was available to play with me. That way I could do my originals. By the time I finished high school, I had the first lineup of the Hughes Taylor Band in place and we were playing gigs." Despite the inevitable lineup changes in his band, he continued refining his technique and developing a signature sound while recording and releasing three studio albums between 2016 and 2019 (along with a live album recorded in the UK in early 2020). By the time he began working on Modern Nostalgia, he also solidified what he considered to be the definitive lineup of the band. Written during the pandemic and recorded at the legendary Capricorn Sound Studios in Macon, GA, the album comfortably takes its place as a modern successor to the great music that put Capricorn on the map many years ago. Modern Nostalgia plays out like a rewrite of the Blues roadmap of the past 50 years, but it also shows reverence to the past. A Chicago shuffle retains all its traditional hallmarks, Texas blues retain their Lone Star signature, and a classic road song is still a classic road song. But it's Taylor's keen songwriting sense that elevates everything and breathes new life into it all. Across the album's 12 songs, it becomes quickly apparent he's as adept at self-editing as he is at playing; there are no wasted notes but it all still feels loose and casual with an innate sense of precision.

VIRGINIA AND THE SLIMS

www.virginiaandtheslims.net

Virginia and the Slims is a jump blues and swing band from Asheville, NC, started in Summer of 2013. They write and have recorded blues-based songs suitable for dancing in the style of the swing tunes and jump blues of old.

As a matter of necessity, Swing met its baby sister, Jump Blues, in the era of World War II when there was a shortage of brass players and horn parts were put into the guitar, keyboard, and sax lines, thus making the band size smaller. In the spirit of that configuration, the band today stands strong with Joanna Best on lead vocals, James Kamp on saxophone, Charlie Mojo Rapp on bass, Charles Singletary on keys, Howie Neal and Kim Eiring on Guitar and John Barrett on drums. During the pandemic, the band, with its unstoppable energy, shifted momentum to record an album of 10 originals, all vibrant and with vintage vibe, titled Busman's' Holiday. With a name inspired by a brand of cigarette with ties to the band's home state of North Carolina (and named after the first lead singer of the band), the band recently celebrated the history of those ties with a tour across the state and down into NC's vanguard tobacco regions. Their music calls up the spirit of hard work and connection to the elements (Push on Through), the comradery and conviviality of community life (Your Money's No Good)-- and specifically to New Orleans (Take Me to the Mardi Gras)---and of course the ins and outs of love lost and gained (Let It Go, Trace, When Will I Find Him, Sugar Baby, It Ain't The Way I Walk, I'll Be Back Again). Hallmarking the spirit of positivity, Shine closes the CD and commands feet on the dance floor!

Conveniently harkening to Virginia and the Slims' Asheville location, adjacent to are The Seven Sisters, a locally well-known, much-beloved mountain range only about three and a half miles long. It is comprised of seven neatly ascending "sisters" leading to their "father," Graybeard Mountain) An analogy that encapsulates the music is that the Seven Slims (which includes Virginia) embody the seven sisters of Blues (jump blues, swing, rhythm-and-blues, rock n' roll, rock-a-billy, country swing, and big-city), leading to their "father," the Blues which strikes a chord! It is then fitting for a band in the southern region of the United States so to do as well!

Virginia and the Slims keeps an active performance schedule, often with pre-show dance instruction provided. Check out our website www.virginiaandtheslims.net and visit us in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. Let's jump, dance and swing!

BLUE MOUNTAIN TRIBE

bluemountaintribe.com

Our band is Blue Mountain Tribe. I'm Robin Hairston. I was brought up in the sixties when everyone was listening to Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin.

Every time I heard the Blues I got so excited. The music resonated through my soul. My friends thought I was crazy or smoked too much pot. When I was 16, my mother was in hospital dying of cancer. I never had a father. My papa was a rolling stone, where he laid his hat was his home. My mother's last words to me before dying were, "Robin, you're going to be a great musician someday. Don't knock on doors, kick the SOB's i!" At the age of 18, I joined the Marine Corps. A friend of mine played harmonica. I loved the sound of it and started learning it. After a while, everyone told me I sucked.

But I kept remembering what my mother had told me. Years later I became a very good harpist playing in a lot of blues bands. As my son Caleb grew up, he had a great talent for guitar, so we started a band together. Starting off as a Blues and classic rock cover band. Though we didn't have a vision, we jammed where we could. One day my wife Paris and I were watching TV, and Native American rock band named Xit came on. Man, they rocked! I told my wife and Caleb that I wanted our band to become all Native American and all original Blues. A work friend, Pat Mata, was a great drummer and Native American and joined us. Jeff Cooper, also known as "Cooper Hawk", was a local bass player who was also Native American, who also joined. Blue Mountain Tribe is an all-original Blues/rock band who sing about Indigenous people, war veterans, people with disabilities, love, desire, rage, pain, and hope. Blue Mountain Tribe's mission is for the greater good to support charitable Native American events, with emphasis on Indigenous Youth, people with disabilities, our veterans, and stopping suicide amongst Native American youth. We are two-time winners of the Native American Music Awards. Our song, Pray For Our Planet, has been played all over the country including Australia and Ireland. We have been in six newspapers. We've been on five radio interviews.

We've performed at numerous Las Vegas concerts. Winners at the Latino/Native American film festival. We've been rated by Spinditty as one of the top Native American bands of all time. This is a great honor since there have been thousands of Native American bands since the sixties. Our members are Robin Hairston (vocals and harmonica); Caleb Hairston (lead guitar); Pat Mata (drums); and Jeff Booper (bass. It's a long way to the top if you want to play the Blues. We made it. We're in The Blue Matters! Magazine.

RARE UNION

rareunionband.com

The start of Rare Union began in 2019. It started with LA Smith a percussionist from New York.

LA Smith had been wanting to produce a CD, with a lot of percussion, to pass percussion on to kids all over the world. After completing a national tour with The Randy Oxford Band in 2014, LA decided to play at festivals with headliners, and do percussion workshops. Passing percussion kids all over the western hemisphere.

At the same time, Martin Cage lead guitarist from Nemesis, was looking to put some of his original compositions on a CD. LA now out of Columbia MO, and Martin out of Salt Lake UT, decided to get together.

They went into El Centro studio in Columbia, Missouri and start recording. They added Jerry Russo, a local rhythm drummer and the three of them put together the first six songs.
Then the pandemic hit, and it was a challenge to bring any artists together. The studio added UV lighting and slowly they started to work on the CD. Martin Cage had played with vocalist, guitar player Max Soler from FT Myers in the group Nemesis, so when they called Max, he was ready to go. They had Will Reeves on bass and Danny Carrol on drums, both from Columbia, MO and they played together in several groups.

The songs started to get real heart felt lyrics, guitar breaks and solos that bring out the original sound of Rare Union. They did not go into the studio trying to produce a particular sound, just wanted to make good music. What happened was chemistry, with five artists, with all different backgrounds, from 5 states playing together. Songs Martin had composed evolved and began to take shape, Max would add lyrics and guitar. Both Martin and Max would switch off on lead and rhythm. LA and Danny would build the structure of the songs and decide how to incorporate the drums and percussion. They ended up with a new blues rock sound.

Micael Kott was added on Cello, from Santa Fe NM. His recording was done at Frogville Studios in Santa Fe. Michael Kott plays cello all over the world with Peter Buffet.

With the CD getting produced the band needed a name. That's where Dawn Smith suggested Rare Union. It described this band, born in a pandemic. Dawn set up the production of the CD, web site, Domain, copyright, and trademarks.

Naming the CD, Max Soler and Martin Cage had a friend who passed, he was considered a brother. So, the band named the CD, "Brother of Mine".

Rare Union is now setting dates to do three videos and the start of the next CD in March with projected release by Mid October.
They have been invited to several festivals and are lining up festivals around the world to play, hoping for 2022, but with the pandemic touring may start in 2023.

SARI SCHORR

THE QUEEN FROM QUEENS

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Supplied**

Sari Beth Schorr was born in Queens, New York, and now resides in Brooklyn New York. She has one of the finest blues voices that I've ever had the pleasure of listening to, both live and in the studio. A voice that grabs you and pins you to the wall, as well as being silky smooth with the deliverance of an angel. I recently caught up with her at her home in Brooklyn via zoom to chat about touring, recording and everything in between.

TOURING COMPLICATIONS

The world of touring has changed significantly over the last eighteen months or so, for obvious reasons, affecting all live performances and performers. Sari herself had to cancel her upcoming British tour at virtually the last moment, "We were kind of put in a corner for two months beforehand, it was looking pretty dismal, jumping over hurdles from one country to another, all of who had differing covid restrictions. We couldn't take the chance of us getting grounded in any one country if god forbid, one of us got covid, it would have bankrupted the whole tour. I have to say that my record label did a magnificent job trying to make all the pieces fit, but there was differing information on the US website about what was happening in different European countries and I wasn't prepared to put my band or the audience at risk for something that was beyond my control, it just would not have been fair to anyone".

NEW MUSIC

Sari has almost completed her new album which will be available in the early part of next year, which will hopefully coincide with the UK tour dates that have been rearranged. "March, I think will be here before we know it, so that seems like the perfect time to plan to be back in the UK with a whole arsenal of new music. I've given the record label (Manhattan Records) enough material to sift through. I don't want to release an album of really dark songs, so I've been writing slightly differently than I usually do. The piano was my first instrument, so I'm a lot more comfortable writing on the piano, but switching to guitar steers me away from complicated chords and I'm much more simplistic, it gives me so much more inspiration. When I run out of ideas on the piano, then switch to the guitar it takes me somewhere else. My creativity finds a new direction. During lockdown I've not been as relaxed when I'm writing as I usually am, I'm used to having a room full of people to share ideas with".

We continued discussing the varying modes and platforms that music gets distributed on and by, coming to the same conclusion that a copy of an album on CD or a vinyl record is far superior in quality to listening to an album via a download. As an artist growing up in Queens, New York, Sari has been exposed to such a massive array of venues and bands of almost every genre known to man. Knowing from a personal point of view just how diverse and eclectic the New York music scene can be, we chatted about early influences and that light bulb moment of realizing what she wanted to do with her life. ''The first time I was able to buy my own records, I didn't buy just one, I bought a stack, I saved up and bought a record player, I'm the oldest in my family so I didn't have an older sibling to pass records down to me. I went to my local record store and instead of me

buying a record here and there, the shop owner let me set up an account at the store. I bought everything from Led Zeppelin to Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. I always wanted to be like Ella Fitzgerald, to sing like her. I used to practice her scat singing. My voice was always a little overpowering for the acoustic jazz bands that I wanted to join. When I started doing shows in New York, my family would come to watch me and say stuff like, 'open up more, show them what you can do', and I was like 'yeah, maybe I should', but you can't do that in jazz bands. The power side of my voice, and the vast range of it, I didn't perceive it in the same way as fine craftsmanship and intricate ways of projecting it. Then I started looking back at the people who influenced Sarah and Ella, and how they projected their voices differently, people like, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith. I realized that this was a home for my voice, that I didn't have to hold back all the time. It was so much harder for them with all the racial and political crap that they had to go through, they were such tough women, Ma Rainey developed such inner strength, to be able to stick up for herself and fight against so much injustice in her life. They could connect with a higher calling and share their talent in such a way that they didn't seem bitter".

BLACK BETTY AND THE DARK STORY

"The first blues artists that I gravitated towards were, Son House and Leadbelly, I'm a bit obsessive when I first get into something, I'm very focused, there are times when it feels a bit debilitating and myopic because I get so deep into something and so focused. In the beginning, I was trying to learn so much about Son House and Leadbelly all of their material and their context, where they were coming from. Black Betty and Where Did You Sleep Last Night were two of Leadbelly's signature songs, people associate Black Betty with Leadbelly but it pre-dates Leadbelly as an ancient American folk song, sung by a variety of different artists. I'd started doing some of these songs at live shows, then I got asked to perform at The Leadbelly Festival at Carnegie Hall".

Live shows, Eric Burdon and Buddy Guy Performing songs such as Black Betty which has such a dark undertone, and understanding what the song is all about would be hard enough for any performer, but doing it live before a big audience at one of the world's most iconic venues, Carnegie Hall, is another kettle of fish. Add to that, being on the same bill as blues stalwarts as Eric Burdon and Buddy Guy just adds to the pressure of singing a song as divisive as Black Betty. Sari takes up the story… "I was really fortunate to be asked to perform at the Leadbelly Festival at Carnegie Hall right here in New York, I had a lot of songs on my mind, I was thinking seriously about doing Black Betty, but the performance for me almost never happened. The show was running way over and I was backstage, the union guys were telling the producers of the show, the show has to end now at exactly 11.00 pm. It didn't look like I

was going to get on until 11.10 pm, before me was Eric Burdon, and scheduled after me was Buddy Guy. It looked like the three of us were going to be wiped off the show, producers and the backstage guys were arguing, the Carnegie Hall staff eventually said, if you want to run it until midnight then that's fine go ahead, but it'll cost another $ 100,000 extra for the overtime… I couldn't believe it when both sets of producers said, ok we're running the show. So we all got on. A pivotal moment in my life. To interpret someone else's song I wanted to do it justice, get it right because it's such an important song (Black Betty)".

ICONIC VENUES

Having talked quite extensively about Carnegie Hall, I was interested to know, as I am with whomever I chat to, about where would they like to play live if given the opportunity. Having played the Leadbelly Festival, where else would be an iconic venue to play for Sari? "The Royal Albert Hall. I was lucky enough to see Diana Krall perform there a few years ago. It's the reward for all of your efforts from the very beginning, from writing songs, putting them into a little book, saving them for a future opportunity to showcase them on an album or on at such an iconic venue as The Royal Albert Hall. These venues have a life of their own, from the artists that have played there. It's the same for me having played the legendary CBGBs in New York where The Ramones played and Blondie played, it had such an energy about it and now it's a goddamn clothing store, I cringe every time I walk past it. Sadly there are too many of these small clubs that gave bands a start on their journey that no longer exist".

With that, we said our goodbyes, with both of us looking forward to the release of the new album and the rescheduled tour dates for 2022. Sari can be assured of a great welcome back to the UK, proving to us all that she can always be referred to as 'The Queen of the blues from Queens'.

www.sarischorr.com

DAN
PATLANSK
LET LOOSE

South African Dan Patlansky is an established musician, vocalist, songwriter. His latest, self-produced album, 'Shelter Of Bones,' is the perfect opportunity to hear his talents in action. Dan sat down with Blues Matters via Zoom prior to the Christmas festivities to tell us all about it:

by **Glenn Sargeant** Images: **Tobias Johan Coetsee (studio) & Laurence Harvey (live)**

Hi Dan, how are you?
Hello! I'm excellent Glenn.

The new album 'Shelter of Bones' was co-produced by yourself and Tom Gatza from Hamburg, Germany. How did you want to approach the album either personally or as a team?
Well let me just say that he produced three of the eleven songs. I think that the main kind of premise for the album was to dial it back a bit in terms of going a little more lateral towards the blues if you compare it to previous albums. Previous albums have been slightly heavier in a sense. My first love is the blues; I come from that blues kind of background. Not going back to traditional blues necessarily, just to have a little bit more of that latter feel on the whole album. That was the basic global premise for this album.

One of the tracks I really like on this album is 'Soul Parasite' which has tinges of Led Zeppelin. Was that done consciously or sub-consciously?
I think probably more on a subconscious level because I'm a massive Zeppelin fan and I have been since I was a kid. If you listen to anything enough, the vibes of that eventually start coming out in your own writing. That's a great question, because the heaviness - like the blues-rock heaviness - is where I want to be in the production kind of mind -frame. That song definitely had that intention, I suppose. I definitely look at Zeppelin as a reference for songwriting, arrangements and all that kind of thing.

Interestingly, that was one of a couple of tracks that you took on vocal, guitar and bass duties. Was that kind of a deliberate thing for you or was that more of an intent?
That's a good question. Just to answer that question I will kind of explain the recording process of the album: it was originally tracked in 2019, and supposed to be released in 2020. That is the worse year in the history of man to release an album so that gave me an opportunity to rework songs and to change things. So, because I had already paid a ton of money to session musicians, studios to do the initial recording , and I wasn't entirely happy with the product. When it came time for re-recording I had to kind of be a little more economical with it. Obviously, I can't play the drums so I had to get my drummer into track it but bass is something within reason, something I can play as long as it is not over-complicated . it is a guitar player bass part. It was just because it didn't seem to make sense on that particular song to book a bass player. I felt confident enough to play the bass parts.

That is a good thing though, because it is your record and you do have an approach on how you want it to sound. Then you have 'Snake Oil City' and in my notes I have "Although it is a fictional place, the subject matter mirrors reality". Would that be a fair statement?
(Laughs) It would be the fairest statement you've made all day I promise you! I'll tell you why; I live in South Africa and it is a beautiful country with beautiful people but like most countries right now the government is insane. That is the only word I can fathom to bring out. It feels like the government is just a bunch of criminals. An example of that is when this whole pandemic hit our economy was not doing great before this hit and then a lot of businesses shut up shop. Then one of these big organisations gave the South African government tens of billions of dollars as a little injection into the

economy. Not one cent can be accounted for and it just went into politicians back pockets. It feels like we are being run by a criminal enterprise. That is where the whole storyline for 'Snake Oil City' came from. It is the most traditional blues song on the album and it's got that and I thought "What better subject matter for a traditional blues song." A fairly bleak scenario I guess.

I was going to mention this; you have a headline tour on the UK in March/April 2022 and I thought to myself , "I bet he could be really sneaky and play that song and then without saying anything segue into 'Taxman' by The Beatles.

(Laughs) You know what? It is so interesting that you say that because I actually did an online John Lennon festival for his birthday. It was run and setup by Mollie Marriott the daughter of Steve Marriott. Mollie is a good friend of mine and she toured with us a couple of years ago on a particular album and she set this whole thing up. Even though that is not a strict John Lennon song, that was the song I performed on there because it has a blues basis. I had very similar thoughts when I was learning the lyrics to the song it strikes a crazy resemblance to 'Snake Oil City' in a sense. It is a very similar scenario.

I don't really like pigeonholing music but you do have a couple of ballads on this album. The inclusion of 'I'll Keep Trying' has you in a reflective mood.

Was that a difficult song to write?
It was a very difficult song to write. That was one of the songs that was produced by Tom (Gatza) and I found that his strength as a producer is ballads. He knows how to draw the most out of ballads and it was a very reflective and personal place to write from. It is pretty much about my personal downfalls in life and it is written towards my wife saying I understand the downfalls that I have and it is something that I am constantly trying to work on and improve on. We've got downfalls in our personalities but it is about recognising them. I tend to write a lot about stuff that worries me and keeps me up at night and I need to change that.

That's strong assessment. I suppose you could say it is some form of emotional acknowledgement. Would that make sense?
Without a doubt! I often find that people say if you have problems write them down on a piece of paper. For me, if you take it one step further and write a song about it that is a very powerful thing to be honest about who you are as a human being. By writing a song about it, you become more aware of it and you have a really good think about it. It is almost therapy.

I agree with you on that completely. 'Presence' has got a lovely psychedelic guitar tone. What guitar, pedals/effects did you use?
Let me just think about that – on 'Presence' we got a keyboard clavinet, a pokey sound. I was pretty much using the same type of rig that I was using on the rest of the record a standard clean sound. A slightly overdriven sound for the chorus. I think a lot of that psychedelia comes out with that particular keyboard sound. It very often gets mistaken for a guitar because it has a distorted kind of tone to it. It is the same sound that Stevie Wonder used on 'Superstitious' and it gives it a guitar tone and feel with the psychedelia vibe.

Okay that makes sense I just wasn't sure. You will be touring the UK in Spring 2022 with special guest Arielle. How are you feeling about touring globally after the last couple of years?
One word – ecstatic. To be honest, during the lockdown I had moments where I thought this would never ever happen again. I have done limited touring in South Africa but 2010 was the last time I toured the UK with Walter Trout. It is almost surreal and I am beyond excited to be touring again. To get on the plane and get back with the UK musicians I use. I almost have this level of anxiety because I haven't done it since 2019 almost like I am doing it for the first time again. But the feeling of excitement, anticipation and joy is overriding that. It is almost a small slice of normality again where you can go on a plane and go to another country and go tour. I almost took that for granted before that you could just do that. It is going to be my first time leaving the borders of South Africa since 2019. Super excited to bring this tour to people.

In terms of the shows, is it going to be a trio setup or is that planning still in the works?
So for the last couple of years I have always toured as a four-piece, the trio plus a keyboard. But on this tour I am going back to the trio because for many many years I toured in that format. The trio brings a very particular raw real sound. It has something magical and a lot my heroes like Jimi Hendrix - they grew up in trios. I have decided to go with a trio and when I was touring South Africa we are still limited in venues and I couldn't afford to take the full band out on the road so I had to leave the keyboard behind. I love the challenges of a trio with these incredible musicians.

Dan Patlansky's new album "Shelter of Bones" is released by Virgin on February 25. The album is available from www.danpatlansky.com.

His UK tour with special guest Arielle, runs from March 31 until April 12, 2022. Tickets: www.thegigcartel.com

I've been fortunate enough to see you perform live in the UK a few times over the years . I was at your first show at The Borderline in London and saw you again with Joe Satriani at the Hammersmith Apollo. That must have been a really fun tour for you?

It was fantastic. That was one of the highlights of my career and I have been fortunate enough to support big names such as Bruce Springsteen in Johannesburg but Satriani was really special. Firstly, I grew up listening to the guy and secondly I found it was more of an appropriate audience that I was exposing myself to. Even though I don't necessarily do the Joe Satriani thing it was a guitar loving audience. It was really a life-changing tour because Joe himself was one of the most humble guys I have ever met in my life. Not mentioning names but I cannot say that about everyone I have supported in my life and I have had times when it has been a difficult tour and you feel like you are intruding all the time. With Joe it was completely different and it helps to play well and feel comfortable and it is one of those tours I will remember on my deathbed.

BETH HART
WHOLE
LOTTA
LOVE

Now, I've heard the phrase 'the bar has been raised' many times as a blues journalist, often with regards to recordings and live gigs. Beth Hart has raised the bar high so many times that it seems the bar itself is now out of reach to many. Time and time again I've had the pleasure of watching Beth leave her soul out on stage with a crowd who walk away from a live performance collectively shaking their heads in wonderment.

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Supplied**

The recording bar is once again flying high with her latest album, 'A Tribute To Led Zeppelin,' due for release in February 2022. We chatted via zoom at her home in Los Angeles, California, about all things Zeppelin, blues, gospel, and the events of the past eighteen months.

TOURING COMPLICATIONS

Beth had toured Europe including a few shows in England but sadly had to cancel the last four, including a double-hander at The London Palladium, one of which was to be a one-woman show: "Okay, we were touring Europe and England, and in between, we were due to do a huge tour of Russia. We were on tour about six weeks in total, then one by one certain venues started shutting us down due to varying restrictions; but we did manage five shows in England. Then what happened was the venues insisted on us doing a Covid test every day before we were even allowed into the building which was okay, but the rest of the venues weren't having it at all. They wouldn't accept that. So, they shut us down. But who rules these things? Not us, not the venues, but the promoter. He's scared that if things go wrong, he'll lose out, and the venues didn't want to know. So, it was taken right out of our hands. So, it seems that Covid is still rearing its ugly head, devastating live gigs around the world even though the majority of people connected with it are double vaccinated. It's still affecting every aspect of touring but we must be grateful for our health and well-being and look towards the future."

I've been lucky enough to see Beth perform four times in the recent past and I was looking forward to catching her one-woman show at her first gig at The Palladium. I was surprised when she explained that she has done this kind of gig in the past, so it wasn't a scary leap into the unknown for her: "My manager, David Wolfe, had me doing this a few years ago. The first one was in a small church in England, then I did a few more gigs totally on my own and ended up doing a small tour in a one-woman show, but I was so nervous. So when I do a one-woman show now, I do almost all of it alone, then right at the end I bring out my guitarist, Jonny, and he joins me for a couple of songs."

A TRIBUTE TO LED ZEPPELIN

When I first became aware that Beth was recording a tribute album, I naturally thought it would most likely be a tribute to, Billie Holiday, Etta James, or Nina Simone. What I didn't expect was A Tribute To Led Zeppelin, a personal favourite band and the reason that I got into the blues in the first place. For Beth to record an album of Zeppelin songs in her own unique style, well… let's just say I was more than intrigued. So, what was the reason behind it?: "I didn't choose to do it initially. Rob Cavello was working on something else which happened to be a full orchestra playing Led Zeppelin songs, with no singer, just full-on orchestration. We were working on my album, 'War In My Mind', and he said, I've got this arrangement for Whole Lotta Love and I know you know how to sing it. So, after we'd pretty much done for

the day, we were in the control room, I put on the phones and set it down. Then It was over, simple as that. Dave Wolfe told me, 'Rob wants you to sing the album.' I said, absolutely not, don't wanna do it. A) I'm a girl; B) I don't wanna get shot by a die-hard Led Zeppelin fan. I didn't have the rage that I used to have. And you need rage to pull something like this off''.
I totally understand where Beth is coming from. It's not just a case of stepping into Robert Plant's shoes, you have to fully enter the world of Led Zeppelin, and nobody has ever done that before.

Hart goes on to explain her thinking: "I didn't grow up listening to Zeppelin, I grew up listening to opera, jazz, soul, and blues and also Black Sabbath. So this was alien to me in many ways, but all of a sudden covid hit. I was so angry with how things were going, I got my rage back, called Rob (Cavello) and told him to send me the melodies, send me everything, I'm going to do this. I remember as a kid hearing Black Dog for the first time, and thought, If I ever become a singer, that's what I want to sing, It blew my mind". We discussed the tribute album in some detail, our first time when we heard Zeppelin, our favourite Zeppelin song, which we both agreed depends upon what mood you are in at the time, It's so nice to talk to someone who understands music and how it affects and translates, according to circumstances. "I fell madly in love with Jimmy Page's ability to not only write so well but also to arrange in the way that he did," she adds.

KENNEDY CENTRE HONORS

Many, if not most, have probably seen the Hart performance at The Kennedy Centre Honors show, and may have found themselves moved

by their rendition of Stairway To Heaven. Apart from that stunning performance, other tributes were being performed by other artists including Bonnie Rait, Jeff Beck, Tracy Chapman: and Beth Hart performing Sweet Home Chicago for Buddy Guy. Hart picks up the story: “It was really weird, It’s one of the few times that I wasn’t scared about performing, not scared at all. I knew that in the audience were Aretha Franklin, Led Zeppelin, and of course my favourite guitarist of all time, Buddy Guy; and to top it off, President Obama and The First Lady. I had no fear. Zero fear.”

A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF MUSIC, BLUES MUSIC AND THE HISTORY BEHIND IT

This is not your typical interview as I have been accustomed to doing many times before, this is a chat with someone I feel I’ve known all my life. That’s the feeling I get with Beth. We discuss so many things apart from the upcoming album, our shared dislike of downloads, our shared feelings of fate, and how things were meant to be, especially surrounding the new album, race, and how it has affected and inflicted so much pain for blues artists from the dawn of time. And our understanding of what blues music is all about, to feel it, not just to perform it or write about it. I was desperate to hear how Beth approached songs such as Strange Fruit, with its dark and inhumane story of terror and hardship many people know nothing about.

STRANGE FRUIT: THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG

“Okay, Billie Holiday and me. So when it comes to Billie Holiday, I had read her book about her life when I was young, I have a very strong affinity with Black people and Black artists. They have had such terrible treatment, especially in America, what do they do? They take it, and they turn it right around. They turn it into jazz, and especially blues, which in turn, allows them to invent rock’n’roll. They take all this shit that has been dealt them and they come back and say, we are not taking this anymore, this is who we are. Billie Holiday, where she came from, her childhood, she could have been forgiven for turning violent towards the people who treated her like she was nothing, worthless. Instead, she turned out to be one of the loveliest, talented, greatest jazz singers of all time. She was the only singer that could sing jazz exactly like the blues. Then Nina Simone comes along and, to me, she’s a prophet, alongside Martin Luther King, Buddha, Nelson Mandela, and Jesus. The ones who came to make a change. So, when I came to sing Strange Fruit, I knew where that song came from, what that song was all about. As a child, Billie came across a lynching, saw two children crying because their father was trying to take their mother down from the tree. That’s what Billie saw, that’s why she kept getting put into prison because she was singing a song that was causing an uprising. So when I see Billie Holiday, and I perform that song, I am inside her world, right there.”

As I attested to earlier, this was not a run of the mill interview with one of the greatest female blues artists of all time. This was a mutual understanding and respect for everything that we both hold dear, a deep sense of feeling and understanding of the blues, from its humble and sometimes desperate beginnings. Of tales of hardship and desperation, and how the blues helps to heal the wrongs of the world. Before we said our goodbyes, with tears in our eyes for what has been such an emotional and uplifting hour of chatting, I told Beth that the version of ‘I’d Rather Go Blind, Live In Amsterdam,’ is the greatest performance I’ve ever seen by any artist. That’s just my opinion of course, but I dare anyone to watch it and not feel deeply moved. This has truly been the most soul-bearing interview that I’ve ever had the privilege of being involved with.

A Tribute To Led Zeppelin is released on Mascot/Provogue on February 25th, 2022.

www.bethhart.com

ERIC GALES

LONG LIVE THE K

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KING

Crowns, kings and princes are like something from a fairy story or maybe Game Of Thrones. Well I suppose in many ways the rebirth of Eric Gales is a fairytale with what looks increasingly like a happy ending. Considered a child prodigy when he burst onto the scene in the early 90's and standing out by playing a right handed guitar upside down, although not naturally left handed. A throwback to being taught by his left-handed brother.

by **Steve Yourglivch** Images: **Laura Carbone**

Although he always achieved a level of success something seemed to hold him back from the super star status his talent warranted. He increasingly developed a drug habit that eventually lead to him being charged with drug and firearm offences. Re-arrested whilst on probation ended up with Eric being given a three year imprisonment sentence. The rebirth of him as a person and performer since those dark days has been spectacular. Now clean and sober for five years plus the creative juices have been in full flow. Previous record Bookends was a revelation and with the help of co-producers Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith new release Crown promises to continue the journey. I caught up with a weary Eric via zoom in his tour bus early in the morning after a late show the night before but the man described by Joe Bonamassa as the best blues guitarist on the planet was charming and ready to talk to Blues Matters.

Eric, thanks for making the time to zoom today, I know you're in the middle of a pretty strenuous schedule right now.
No problem man, I am pretty tired right now, we're right in the middle of stuff.

I know you've just got back from playing in Brazil and now you're part of the Allman Family Revival tour. Apart from being tiring are you having fun?
Oh yeah man, it's been great, amazing, awesome. Words cannot describe it.

We spoke together when Bookends came out. I thought that was an amazing album that I thought was going to be Grammy nominated. I really don't understand why that didn't happen but now we have the new release 'Crown'. In my mind Bookends drew a line across what had gone before, and it was a new beginning.

Crown takes that another step forward, do you agree with that?
Yeah, that's exactly what the aim was and I think we hit the mark this time for sure.

Lots of the tracks are reflective and seem very personal. I'm thinking in particular about I Found Her, My Own Best Friend and You Don't Know The Blues. They are kinda autobiographical about your life.
Yes they are. That's the best I can write about, you know things I've been through. I don't know how to write about stuff I ain't been through right. It's pretty self-explanatory if you listen to the lyrics and I think the listener will then be able to relate to things in their own life then. But yes, almost everything I write about are things I've been through in my life.

Are you happy with how the album has turned out? Especially working with Joe and Josh Smith in the studio.
I'm pleased, very pleased. We all came together as friends and worked together for a common goal which was to make the best Eric Gales record possible and I think it happened.

You and Joe go back a long way, I believe.
Yeah a little bit. Almost thirty years we've known each other so to see the two worlds come together finally was a great thing man. I couldn't be more ecstatic about it.

When you were both young bucks making waves on the scene I remember a lot of comparisons being made but did you ever work together in those days?
No. We never really worked together but he opened up a show for me once when he was in Bloodline. That's where we met for the first time. Our lives went separate ways then but it's such a pleasure that everything has come back around in such a big way.

The album comes out on January 28th and I think you have a big UK tour to promote it.
Yes I do, in March hoping that everything doesn't go backwards again as far as Covid is concerned. We'll be over there for almost a month and we can't wait to get back to the races with this new record. In fact we've got a bunch of touring coming up. After the UK, Europe and beyond. I plan to be out promoting this album for the next eighteen months maybe two years to give it the opportunity it deserves to end up in the hearts and souls of anybody who chooses to listen to it.

You pay tribute to LaDonna on the record and she does vocals on Take Me Just As I Am. She has clearly been a huge influence on you.
Yes, absolutely. It was Joe's idea to feature her on that song. She didn't want to do it at first, she was like no, no. We talked her into it and it turned out great. She has an incredible voice.

Another thing I love on the album is that it isn't all just straight down the middle blues. There are things going off in different tangents that is really refreshing.
The whole idea was, you know blues shuffles etc, that's all been done. I wanted to do a little shift in the way I'm seeing it through my eyesight and there can be different spices and seasoning spread through the traditional blues the world has known for some time without losing its meaning or effect. I'm not taking away from the old traditions because that's what I grew up with, that's where I come from. I'm trying to be the 2022 version of myself and be the best version of myself and that will include all kinds of styles and inspirations that have touched my life.

It's really important that artists like you evolve in that way so that the Blues continues to be relevant and important to todays youngsters.
It will strive because it stands alone on it's own merit. But for the youngsters to connect it can't be dinosaur music as they would see it. You know even stuff from the 60s and 70s is dinosaur to them. I'm not intentionally aiming at them but I'm just doing what feels good to me and if that helps bridge a gap between the old and new then that's a win win situation. I can only do what hits me and my spirit. The music comes to me from another entity. It's the same in the studio, you have more time to prepare to make it the best version it can be, but the music is still spontaneous, off the cuff. If I think about it too hard I get in the way so I try to keep out the way and let the music do its thing man.

You are using brass on some of the tracks too, adding another extra flavour.
Yeah, that's a new ingredient that I brought into the pot. I trusted Josh and Joe on these things and they turned out sounding great man, and elevated it to the next level.

So Josh and Joe had input into the writing?
Yeah we all did, we sat down collectively and said how can we make the best possible Eric Gales record, we weren't there to make a Joe record, or a Josh record, we were there to come together and they put those hats on and very fortunate to have had minds in the room that were able to come to one common goal.

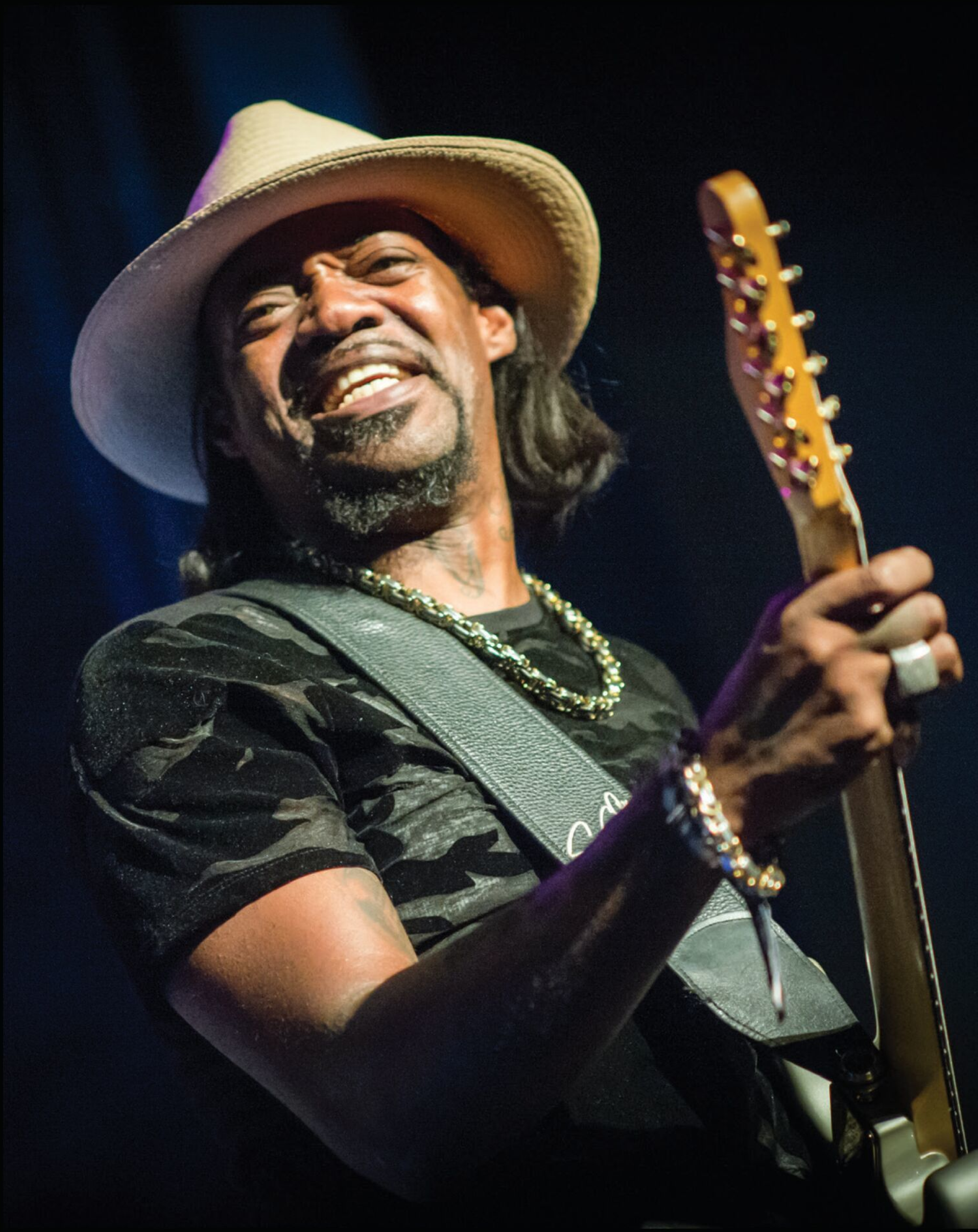
I love those little two minute sections of playing

that you've added at different points.
Yeah, yeah, I love those. Me and Joe were remembering old blues records and you would hear like 45 seconds of a song and then fade out. I think I'm going to continue doing those on records going forward cos I remember them making you feel like you want to hear more.

Apart from Joe and Josh you've got super writers like Tom Hambridge involved.
I was so fortunate with the people who got involved in this record and brought their expertise.

They certainly have and the record is great. I'm sure it will continue to elevate the new Eric Gales success story.
I really do feel like my situation now is rising phoenix like from a back story of everything I've been through and where I stand now, five and a half years clean and just taking my life to where it's supposed to be. I hope the world accepts this record and let it get into their hearts and minds.

www.ericgales.com



WIL
&

LE
THE BANDITS

Each one of us has our own lockdown story to tell. It's a time in our lives that we will never forget. But one common thread that runs through all of it is the stillness encountered during these strange times – everything stopped.

by **Adam Kennedy** Images: **Laurence Harvey**

Thankfully, this quiet period also gave creatives and musicians alike a time to reflect and work on new material. At least that was the case for Cornish blues/rock outfit Wille and the Bandits. "I think I was in need of a break," explains frontman Wille Edwards. "When it happened, it was quite a magical time - especially living here in Cornwall. There was literally no one about - the beaches were empty. I was fishing and surfing, and there was no one about. I spent a lot of time with family."

These unprecedented times on the South Coast of England were food for thought for the British songwriter. This era of serenity also happened to inspire the title of the group's new album, 'When The World Stood Still'. "It felt like everyone reflected and stood still and took in nature. Everyone was really appreciative of it."

Strange times or not, time was on the artist's side when working on their latest offering. "The writing was amazing because normally you're trying to fit in your writing in between touring," explains Edwards. "Because everyone was not gigging, we just went up to the keyboard player's studio in Preston, and we stayed there for two weeks." Being housed together in the studio, the group got to work. "We spent literally 14 hours a day writing songs. I've never had that intense creative experience before. It's always been quite a sporadic thing," said Edwards. Of course, there wasn't too much else to do at the time. "There were no distractions. I wasn't going to the pub. There was nothing open," he says.

With their latest project, Edwards wanted to fulfil a lifelong dream which was to record at the Sawmills studio. The latter being one of the first residential recording facilities in the UK and boasting somewhat of a picturesque setting on the banks of the River Fowey. "We really wanted to record at Sawmills, which is a very famous studio in Cornwall," said Edwards. "The Stone Roses, Oasis, and Robert Plant - everyone's recorded there. Growing up in Cornwall, around this area, you are forever reminded of this legendary studio."

However, the fate of the studio is presently hanging in the balance. Wille and the Bandits latest release could well be the last album recorded at Sawmills. To make their dream a reality the group turned to their loyal fanbase. "The way we released the album was using the Kickstarter campaign. We asked our fans to fund the album," said Edwards. "We made £16,000 in three days." The benefit of such a successful crowdfunding campaign was that it allowed the group to make the album they wanted to make. "It gave us time to really think about how he wanted to release or who we wanted to use to release it," said Edwards. "It meant we could do it our way. And then obviously, release it now, hopefully in time for the tour."

The fans' involvement in this campaign has been paramount. "During 15 years of touring hard, we've always had time for our fans. We appreciate the platform they give us, and I think it's vice versa. So, I think we've got a strong bond with our fan base, and that was shown with the campaign," said Edwards.

The group was born out of a shared love of the blues. "My roots are very much from the blues. That's the music I loved first and still do to this

day. But it did start with acoustic blues, with your Blind Willie Johnson's and your Robert Johnson's, the foot-stomping resonator. So that's how Wille and the Bandits was born really."

In terms of contemporary artists Edwards sites, the likes of Peter Green, Ben Harper, David Gilmour, and Derek Trucks as influences.

"Derek Trucks is the master when it comes to slide guitar. A lot of what tonally

I'm trying to do on a slide is always looking towards him and that sort of American scene – Derek, Warren Haynes, and those sorts of guys. The way they phrase and take the blues somewhere else," confirms Edwards.

With their latest release, Wille and the Bandits have pushed the boundaries of their music and drawn influence from a multitude of musical stylings and genres. "I'm a songwriter - that's what I am. I write songs, and I play slide guitar. And that has its blues orientations in the sound. I like it to sound like a real band. But the influences are from everywhere," said Edwards. "On this record, there's sort of hip hop influences. There's a lot of funk influences, a lot of blues, a lot of rock. There's also a bit of soul and country. There are all vibes in it."

As a musician, Edwards is most concerned about serving the song rather than trying to stay within the boundaries of a musical style. "For me, the most important thing is you serve the song - not the genre," he says. "If you start trying to write songs within a genre, to fit in a pigeonhole, or to fit in a box that sells well, I think you become more about manufacturing a product rather than being a creative musician. And for me, it's always about trying to be as creative as possible for my benefit and also for the audience."

The artist has tried to avoid external influence from record labels so that the band's musical vision remains intact and authentic. "We've had plenty of interest over the years, but it's never sat right with me," explains Edwards. "I'm a songwriter, and I want to be able to be free to write what I feel like I want to write about and not feel I've got songs that I love, and I'm fairly passionate about, but I can't put them on a record because they don't work."

With an ease in lockdown restrictions during the second half of 2021, Wille and the Bandits were able to resume touring activity. "We were quite lucky, because I sorted out a lot of shows in July that were socially distanced, and I kept them socially distanced because I was always a bit sceptical. So, we did them, and then lots of festivals in the summer. We did a tour of Holland just before it locked down. Then we had a few shows. I mean, I wouldn't call it a busy year pre-pandemic. But compared to a lot of bands, we've been quite busy," explains Edwards.

The frontman concludes by stating that: "The New Year is where the real work starts. There's a lot of ideas for the live set. I want to take these songs to another level live and then do a live album, which would be When The World Stood Still and it would be live. Because I would love to do that. I don't like to just go out and play the songs as they are on the record."

With a return to some semblance of normality within the touring world, Wille and The Bandits fans will have the chance to hear the group's new album live when the band embark on their 26-date headline UK tour (March 4th to April 23rd). The group's new studio album "When The World Stood Still" will be released by Fat Toad Records on January 28th.

willeandthebandits.com

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME -

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HIGHS
BERNARD ALLISON
LOWS

BA
Studio

As the youngest son of the Chicago Blues Hall of Fame bandleader Luther Allison, Bernard was a bluesman from birth, teaching himself to play the guitar by listening to his fathers' releases. Later he advanced his guitar skills with the help of Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan among others and featured in Koko Taylor's band. He also developed a solo career as a bandleader, song-writer, and arranger for Luther.

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Laura Carbone**

His style is contemporary with a mix of funk, blues, soul, and gospel. A prolific singer-song-writer, Bernard has a new release 'Highs And Lows;' Blues Matters caught up with him via the wonders of technology at his home in Minneapolis.

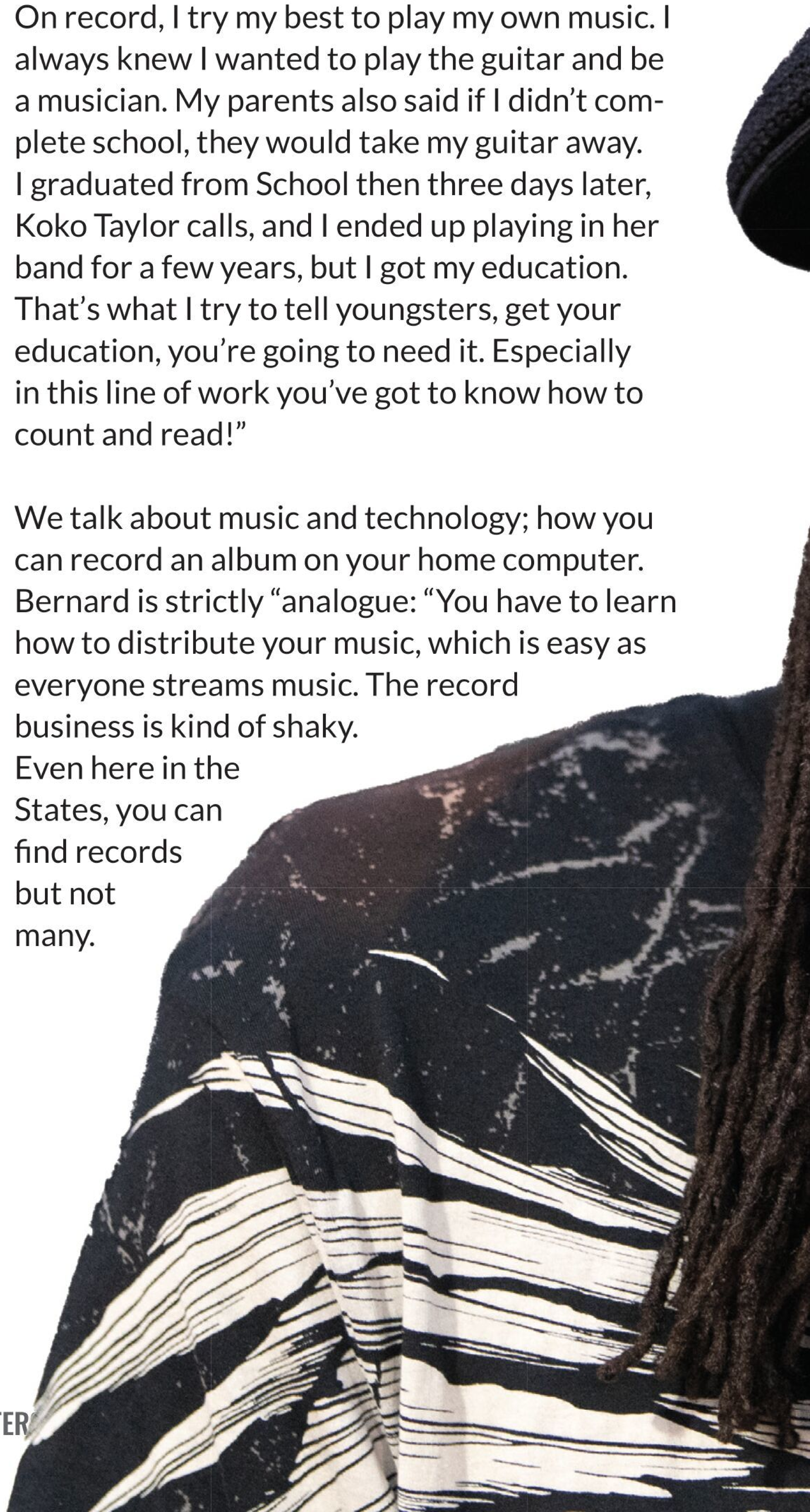
A relaxed conversation with a true, honest musician at his home followed, where the rest of his band reside started with touring. They have not done many concerts since post-pandemic, choosing safety and getting the new release' Highs And Lows' recorded. Bernard musically defies pigeonholing:

"I'm blues for the next generation. I don't rely on the twelve-bar traditional process. A lot of my influences growing up are from Gospel to funk, rock," he explains, adding that his best advice in this area came from his father, Luther, 'Don't let people label you.'

Being one of nine siblings, he listened to all sorts of musical genres to make his own unique style: "If I stayed bluesy, there would be lots of people comparing me to my father. As a group we don't call ourselves a blues band, we are The Bernard Allison Group. In my writing, I go through blues, soul, funk."

Keeping musical styles fresh is not difficult for him: "I always have a recorder and put ideas on and store a lot of things. Even on tour, I do this, I go back and reference things. By doing this it keeps things fresh. With my fathers' songs and mine, I have a huge musical library. I'm in pretty good shape. I always put a couple of my dad's songs on every album to keep his name active (On the new release he covers; Now You Got It and Gave It All). If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't exist! I rarely do covers, sometimes do when playing live, maybe a Hendrix song. On record, I try my best to play my own music. I always knew I wanted to play the guitar and be a musician. My parents also said if I didn't complete school, they would take my guitar away. I graduated from School then three days later, Koko Taylor calls, and I ended up playing in her band for a few years, but I got my education. That's what I try to tell youngsters, get your education, you're going to need it. Especially in this line of work you've got to know how to count and read!"

We talk about music and technology; how you can record an album on your home computer. Bernard is strictly "analogue: "You have to learn how to distribute your music, which is easy as everyone streams music. The record business is kind of shaky. Even here in the States, you can find records but not many.



Everything is virtual or online. Working in the studio making a high-quality recording brings out the best of the best in me and recording with Ruf records is great."
Jim Gaines has again produced his new release: "He is awesome.

He did some with my dad as well. It's like coming home, we work well together. He's family, not like other producers. It's a smooth and fun recording. We love each other's company. All songs are recorded as live; we added my saxophone player. Songs were done in a maximum of two takes. We prepare beforehand so we can do a record in four days. Lots of musicians like to take a year! For me, to get my best, it has to happen within the first two takes, after that the music tends to change, I stay away from that!"

The process for making the new album was collaborative: "I wrote all the music but collaborated with other musicians as they are good songwriters. When we get together there's always different sounding things. It's a different approach but it's still Bernard Allison. The

"everyone makes mistakes but that sometimes makes you sound better"

chemistry between my band and Jim Gaines is the thing. The chemistry is hard to break, it's a family thing."

We turn to the tracks. I'm So Excited is the opener. "This had to be the opening track it's about dealing with the pandemic. We were one of few bands to get a tour in

before the pandemic. I'd released Songs from The Road album then did a four-week tour of Germany, got home a week and that's when it hit. We're so excited to be on the road again! That's what it's about. Strain On My Heart is one of my favourites. I've never attempted an R&B type tune; I can focus more on my vocals here. This is not a guitar song. It sounds amazing with the saxophone. Side Step is pretty awesome also. The album, top to bottom keeps the flow going, rhythms change, we're giving people what the Bernard Allison Group is all about."

There are some special guests on this release including Bernard's Godfather, Bobby Rush: "My ex-drummer and myself wrote a song and I heard where we could go with this, maybe Bobby would be alright about writing the song about him. Bobby is a family member; he introduced my mum and dad. He's a great guy. To have him on this tune is awesome. He also plays the harmonica."

On this release, Bernard's vocal range is much improved, but he has never been vocally coached. "I hated to sing at the beginning. I had a very high voice as a teenager. My dad's like, 'you can't just play the guitar.' I have no vocal training; same with learning guitar. I can't read music; I play everything by ear. I know certain keys to sing so as not to overstretch my vocals. My family are great singers, but none do it professionally. A lot still sing in church choirs. I have nephews and nieces who are taking on the Hip Hop thing. There's so much talent here, it's in the blood. Hopefully, they will get out on the road and be like their father and grandfather."

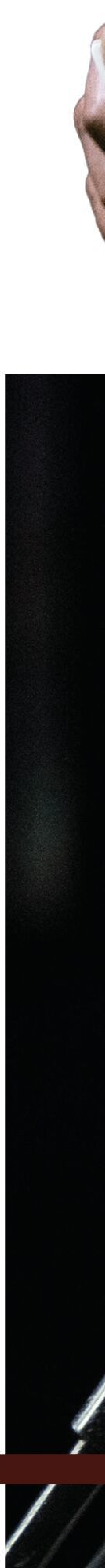
The album title is Highs And lows. Bernard's lowest time was when his father died. "To have the opportunity to play and tour with my father was a dream come true. The high point has to be right now, I'm very happy with this recording and anxious to let my friends and family hear it. I want to focus on my health; am I happy; yes; do I have a roof over my head: yes. I can play music forever but to get that opportunity to get out the house and make music, that's my aim."

On that song, there is a line; They don't like me at home, but they love me overseas. I thought it an interesting lyric, so Bernard explains the background: " I lived in France and played over Europe. My dad left the States because he wasn't getting the attention he should. Again, we're back to the box. He was allowed to do what he wanted to do in Europe. I fell into the same category when I moved to Paris. They loved me because I was doing different things. I had the rock, I had the blues. I thought it would be catchy but honest by putting that line into the song. It represents me and my band. We consider ourselves a European travelling band not an American band because we've spent so much time in Europe. I find European audiences to be older. But the younger ones are starting to come out. I'm playing to a lot of my dad's fans who grew up with a lot of my fans. We restrict ourselves to playing Summer Festivals in America. Europe is my musical home."

"You can put any genre with the blues. I have a project which could be on my next album where it will be a true, Bernard Allison and friend's album. My bass player's son is the Manager of a Hip-Hop group. I'm not a big fan of Hip Hop and Rap but I will do this song with them, I'm putting Bernard Allison style all over it!"

We talk about how much blues matters these days and who is keeping the genre going. He cites Christone Kingfish Ingram and Jemiah Rogers. "Kingfish is holding onto that bluesy vibe. Sure, others start with Stevie Ray Vaughan, but I always tell people to look at where they were coming from musical wise. Kingfish is doing that. He's on the right path. I started playing the guitar when I was twelve, I joined Koko at sixteen. I was the youngest in my graduation class. I wasn't supposed to be in the band. Mom had to give Koko permission to be my Guardian when on the road."

I ask about other influencers, like Stevie Ray



Vaughan: "I met him on my sixteenth birthday. He knew my whole family! We had a great relationship with him and Jimmie, he taught me a lot about going on the road. Johnny Winter taught me how to play slide guitar. Koko and my dad could grab a crowd. It took me a while to get to grips with that part of playing to an audience. The second year in the band I said to Koko we needed to get some moments with the band. Also did this in my father's band, counter-playing, I'd play his guitar, he'd play mine. The crowd loved it! For me to do that, it set me on my path of being me. You must have some sort of stage presence. In my band it's about fun, everyone makes mistakes but that sometimes makes you sound better!"

The best advice musically for Bernard was "Don't let them label you. Don't let people put a stamp on you. People say I'm a blues player. I prefer to be called a musician. That's why I don't call any band my blues band. That puts you in a crowd where you know who's coming to see you. When I lived in Paris, if a band had that in their title, they couldn't play the same venues as my father. They had to play the bluesier scenes. If you're going to succeed, you have to come out of that box sometime! There's a stepladder for every genre of music. I always used my influence so you can't box me in. I think this separates us from most bands!"

Last words go to Bernard for his fans and Blues matters readers; "Be patient we're all going to get through together. Love you thanks for the love and support!"

www.bernardallison.com

Deb Ryder was born south of Chicago, but you could be forgiven for thinking that she was born in the middle of the south side of the city in a blues club when you start to delve into her background. Her latest album, *Memphis Moonlight* is one of the best blues albums that I've heard in the last twenty years. Husband, Ric, plays bass among a plethora of gifted musicians to make this a magnificent record. I caught up with Deb at her home in California.

by Stephen Harrison   Images: Supplied

A BLUES UPBRINGING

"We've had power off and on three times this morning due to the storms overnight, so its fingers crossed that everything holds up ok for us (laughs)" For the first seven years of her life, Deb grew up in Chicago having been born just outside of Peoria, Illinois. To say that she was immersed from a very early age into Chicago blues society is somewhat of an understatement, you could say that it was a calling from the blues that surrounded her almost from birth " We lived in Chicago for several years, my father came home from his service in the military, he was also a great musician, a great vocalist, and that's pretty much where it all started for me as a young girl. In the early days, my dad did all the local clubs and churches, I was very lucky when I was little, I would get up on stage with him and we'd do a duet, and they'd feed me spaghetti and meatballs, and I'd be happy (laughs)".

As Deb got older, she would travel around the various clubs with her dad, sometimes she'd get in, other times she wouldn't, and at the time her grandmother was very tight with the travelling gospel choirs and bands that had started to frequent some of the same establishments. After a few years, her dad was moved with his main job to Los Angeles, Malibu, to be precise where the family unit, unfortunately, did not manage to stay together for long. "Two mid-western people thrust into the world of Hollywood was a little bit too much for them, too many parties too much drinking you know, so then my mother moved us up to Topanga, California, which is where I live right now, she got together with my step-father, and the two of them opened the largest blues and rock and roll venue in Los Angeles, the biggest grossing bar, everybody who was anybody played there, Taj Mahal would play every Thursday, Etta James would come to play over the weekend, Big Joe Turner, The Eagles, Neil Young. The club that Deb refers to was called The Coral. As well as the artists that appeared, there were also the accompanying entourages that helped to spread the word about this amazing blues and rock and roll club. Members of The Beatles, The Stones, Joni Mitchell, anyone who was anyone all had an impact on the musical path that Deb decided to pursue. "My bedroom backed onto the stage so every night the walls would be rattling away all night, as time wore on I used to be the opening act for a lot of these artists, that's how it all started for me, singing and playing my guitar".

LEARNING THE CRAFT

During that period of her early career, Deb had a record contract offer, although her step-father was having none of that, she did shows in Vegas, appeared on many other peoples albums as a backing singer, writer, and all-round performer which helped her learning process right up this day. A learning process that continues day by day, ever-evolving, maturing and getting to where she is right now. "I listen to everything that is coming out, who's new, what are they writing. But I always hark back to the late 50s and all the Chicago stuff, the 60s with stuff from Canned Heat, I was just a young girl dancing in front of them at The Coral, listening to everything they said, and every note they

RYDER

played, the boogie blues which so influenced my style".

MEMPHIS MOONLIGHT

In my capacity as CD Reviews Editor for Blues Matters Magazine, I have the privilege of listening to so many great blues albums. 2021 has been no exception. I had the chance to listen to the latest album from Deb Ryder, Memphis Moonlight, which from the get-go had me enthralled so much that in my review I said that it was one of the best blues albums I've heard in the last twenty years. "My husband Ric (Ric W Ryder) plays great bass, by the way, I did all of the writing, this record was completely different than anything I've done before. In the past, we'd have everyone in the same room. A live recording apart from the drum room, because we liked the energy that came with it, then 3-4 days later we'd have the basic tracks. For this record, I'd written about 22-23 songs, then honed it down to eleven. We managed to get 3-4 songs down then the pandemic shut everything down. I had no idea what was going to happen if we would be able to get back into the studio even. I suddenly had all this time on my hands, no gigs, so I started writing more songs. Johnny Lee Schell, the main engineer, and main guitarist, he and I got together and wrote some more songs, even though we had to do it remotely. So, this album was done so differently than previous albums because of the circumstances, we sent bits of the songs to various people on the album so that they could put their part down, then send it back to us, and so on and so on. In the end, I had complete control with Johnny and my husband Ric and overall, I'm very proud of this record".

ALASTAIR GREENE AND KIRK FLETCHER

"Kirk is one of my oldest friends, he's played on all my records except this last one because of the pandemic, but he's been on every record we've ever done. We made, I Might Just Get Lucky, back in 2013, and he did some amazing work on that album, so every time he comes to LA we take him out to dinner, he's such a phenomenal player - so talented. The second I heard him, I said to my husband, do you think we could get him to play on the album? And Kirk just said sure, when do we do it. Alastair Greene is a tremendous slide guitarist, just amazing, he fitted right in from the start".

OPENING FOR LEGENDS

At the start of her career, Deb had the opportunity to be the opening act at The Coral for some of blues music royalty, Etta James, Big Joe Turner, Taj Mahal, to name but a few. These artists were at the top of their game when they were playing at The Coral, so for Deb to have watched them and opened for them was a lesson that set her on her way to where she is now. "It was a huge influence on me, huge. My mom ran a little restaurant up here called Everybody's Mother, she made the best pies, Taj Mahal would bring his fretless banjo in, I'd get off the school bus and go into the kitchen and do dishes. He would just sit there and play if I got my work done early I'd go sit and jam with him. I'd play my six-string Gibson in between sets or just jam with whoever was playing at that particular time".

After a while, Deb got her band together and this was to lead to one of her biggest lessons from one of blues greatest artists, Etta James. "Etta used to stay in a cabin that we had in the back sometimes when she was performing here. So I'd knock on her door and say, hi Miss Etta, and she'd be like, what you want kid? So I'd run some of my lyrics by her, some of my songs as well, and she could be quite critical at times, I appreciated it, she was mentoring me. She'd ask me, what are you doing, what are you trying to do? You are not writing blues, so she was instrumental in helping me find the feeling, to understand the blues and what I wanted to say. I learned to hone it down, then one day she came back and I played her one of my blues

songs, she said, now you've got it, now you are singing the blues you are going to be a blues artist. It felt like bells were going off, that was the moment I knew that I could do this. That weekend she invited me to do the show with her, I've still got the poster".

COVER SONG WISH LIST

Throughout her career, Deb has penned her own material on every album, a trait that I find so pleasing in these digital times. I wondered if she had a blues tune that she has always wanted to cover "There's a Peter Green tune that I would do, I Need Your Love So Bad. That song gives me goosebumps, so, yeah, I think I'd do that one. It's got all the elements to it, it says exactly what it's supposed to say. I was lucky enough to see him perform once, it was like, I'm not letting you up until I'm done, just amazing".

We continued talking about relevant stuff such as the pandemic and how it had affected everyone in the live music business. Deb had four festivals cancelled due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic. Both of us realized just how devastating it had been for all artists. "LA has dried up. There are hardly any clubs open at the moment, some may open back up under new management, who knows, but live performance is so vital and not being able to connect with an audience is devastating. We don't make much money from recordings, it's the live shows that we depend on, but the connection to the audience is more important than anything".

THE NEAR FUTURE

We talked some more about what could happen in 2022 gig-wise, Deb told me that things are getting in place to maybe have the opportunity for her and her band to come over to England and do some shows if all of the criteria can be met and things go her way. She indicated that Kirk Fletcher could be persuaded to join her for the tour so fingers crossed for 2022. What had been a scheduled forty-five-minute interview turned into an hour and a half chat that was so much fun for us both. I felt like I'd known Deb forever. This also comes across in her music, personal, uplifting, hard, but overall, an overwhelming desire to make great blues music that will last a lifetime.

Donna Herula's third CD, 'Bang at the Door,' includes 14 tracks – 11 original songs and 3 cover songs. The Chicago born blues singer, songwriter, and slide-guitar player uses the influences and love of both Chicago and Delta Blues, as well as Country, Americana and folk music. All this can be heard when you listen to Bang the Door.

by **Erin Scott** Images: **Robert Erving Potter III**

"With this album I wanted to focus on writing songs and writing good songs. My first two albums, I didn't write on them. This was my third one and before, I didn't think I could write as well as some of the people out there…Now I feel like I have a lot to say. And there's a lot, I want to give tribute to. Like Sonny Payne, he was a good mentor. I wanted to share personal experiences and people that I knew," she tells me.

With "Sunshine" Sonny Payne and King Biscuit Time on KFFA in Helena, Arkansas, a show that has run over 80 years and continues after his passing, she was honored to perform live on multiple shows. Although not the original host, Payne introduced Blues artists to many listeners that otherwise in early decades many may never have had the opportunity to hear. He continued doing so until his passing. Donna Herula's first experience was walking into the large studio that sits on the street, with people being able to walk by and see show. Show host Payne wanted Herula to play her way saying, 'We want to hear Donna.' She thought on that first visit, she would be only playing one song, but ended up playing three songs for that day's radio show. She performed for King Biscuit Time multiple times and felt that the host, "Made people feel at home" .
So much so that the track 'Pass the Biscuits' on the CD honors the host and show.

Herula recalls her thoughts on composing this track: "I wanted to focus on song writing as well as my voice. This is the first album I'm not only aware of my guitar playing but also my voice."

Donna always had a passion for music and that voice. Growing up, she started playing piano at five years of age and wrote songs in High School. This was when she was in her first girl band and wrote her first song, 'Midterm Blues,' appropriately titled about midterms in school. It was chosen to be played in the school variety show. Girl bands continued later in life when she played with Chicago Women in Blues.

Some may argue what Blues is: be it Delta only. Chicago blues has it's own style in the region and area, which gave the opportunity to Herula. She often went to the Chicago Blues Festival. It's a great memory for her. It's where she and her husband went on their first date. They often play together and feature as artists on 'Bang the Door.'

Asked if she considers herself a guitar player first, or a singer-song writer, Herula takes the bait: "Originally, first I considered myself a guitar player that sang. But a couple of things I realized in the five or six years is song writing and my voice. I ended up listening to a bunch of albums like Bonnie Raitt and Maria Muldaur in particular. I went to one of her master classes and practiced my voice. I took audio tapes and practiced… With this album I wanted to focus on writing songs and writing good songs. The first two albums, I didn't write them. This is my third one and before, I didn't think I could write as well as some of the people out there… Now I feel I have a lot to say. And there is a lot. I want to give tribute to Sonny Payne. He was a good mentor. I wanted to share personal experiences and people I know," she repeats, warming to her theme.

As Covid hit, we all had our hardships and Donna lost family members in this time. I asked her about her writing and how the album came to fruition:

"The process of song writing came from all over. Things came from me at 2 o'clock in the morning. I was not getting sleep in the process. Things kept coming [to me]. It was like, 'what is the perfect verse? ' Things are toying in my head, and 'what can be better?' It was an interesting process. It was something beyond you. I'm really happy with how the album turned out. I'm excited that people like it as much as I do. I love listening to that album. People are enjoying it and I wanted to give back to the Blues."

In 2012, Donna Herula started playing at Buddy Guy's Legends Club in Chicago. People heard about her because she plays every other month, sometimes weekends, opening the acoustic set at the club. It's a little bit different than other Chicago clubs because they will have a two-hour dinner set from 5:30 to 8 with a half hour break. Herula takes up the tale:

"I love acoustic Blues and I've been doing it for ten years. Being an acoustic, player in an electric Chicago blues scene, I had to adapt my style of playing acoustic blues. People are coming from all over the world, and they want to hear electric Blues. So, I adapted. I love Delta Blues. My favorite kind of music is Delta Blues. I play on resonator guitars. I ended up putting pickups on my resonators. Sometimes I use pedals. But there is a style that is a little more in your face a little bit. I also adapted because acoustic Blues doesn't usually have solos. My style, I love solos, I feel really free."

"You have to make people happy"

She talks again about the mentoring and evolution of artists and of learning adaptations It's about what you like and about what the people like to get those tips coming in too. Performing with other artists, she says the using of call and response and sees getting a dialogue with the audience as exciting. Her time playing on festival streets where she wasn't booked didn't hurt either. Seeing her play as a trio, I saw that energy. It was a space that didn't have tables close to the performers, yet a four-year-old stood by herself for at least two songs engaged and enraptured by the live music.

"You have to make people happy. People come from Australia, England, and all over the world coming to Buddy Guy's. I can just stay at Buddy Guy's and meet people from all over the world. I guess, I haven't been traveling all over but the world comes to me….I'm hoping to do more traveling and touring," Herula says.

Since I talked to Donna about opening for Buddy Guy and I had just been in the Delta seeing other artists play, we had an interesting take and talk of how the New Year and the album is for her. The album's tracks harken back to the days of playing on the street to opening at large venues.

"Like Buddy[Guy], with the album, I wanted to show one person, then there is all the way up to different configurations- all the way up to a full band with back-up singers. I made sure there is different configuration as well as a range of emotion - from sadness to joy; strength to anticipation, frustration, anger. The range of human emotion."

Just like me seeing a little girl standing and watching Donna play at a local venue and knowing that there will be a future audience and the Blues will not die, Donna's voice is being heard worldwide. She teaches the next generation that will keep blues alive. Old Town School has virtual classes where she teaches slide guitar and even electric. Just as in the call and response of the audience or playing with other artists, Donna shared with me that she's learned a lot from her students, saying, 'they have the eyes and ears of great music that I wasn't even aware of, and it helps my song writing.' (It's about…) what they enjoy and what they request."

And it's about the community. Music and blues brings people together. An exciting opportunity at Antioch High School, a suburb of Chicago, is Writer's Week. The school interestingly had a blues curriculum but reached out to Donna and she will be teaching a seven-song-writing workshop over four days to the students. One student's work will be chosen to perform their original work /song with her band on March 25 at an all- school assembly.

In these times of disconnect and loss and kids not always being with each other, it's very exciting to see this creative way to bring a performer to the high school. My days in the Chicago suburbs near Antioch, we sometimes had permission to drive into the city and see bands play and, like Donna Herula, our own high school bands played the blues. We just didn't get the opportunity to collaborate with a professional like Donna.

At that age, she explains, "Who would not want to write a song? That's super cool. You're writing something that means something to you. You're writing from your heart. You're writing with emotion. …And that's what Blues was to me. Writing from your heart."
"If I can help to inspire high school kids to understand what a good song is or what good music is - that's the truth about yourself or other people that you know, and it's sharing that truth. Connecting. It's an honor to do this," she says as we wind up our chat.

donnaherula.com

COREY LEDET
ON THE GRAMMY TRAIL

Corey Ledet will be a new name to many. From Louisiana, Ledet is a Creole singer-songwriter with a second Grammy nomination in the bag and a hugely engaging musical presence that features those explosive, bouncing rhythms and foot-tapping turbulence of much Zydeco music. I caught Corey at home in rural Lousiana for a chat about his music, his hopes and the Grammys.

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Kristie Cornell**

Now hitting forty years of age, Corey Ledet is a squeeze-box/accordeon player with what seems like a lifetime of music behind him as a professional musician since the youthful age of around ten. With fourteen albums under his belt, Ledet is no newcomer to the recording business and with his latest release,' Corey Ledet Zydeco' already a Grammy contender, his second nomination in recent years, no beginner in the awards circus arena either. He laughs when I refer to the Grammys as a circus, but partly agrees that it's a bit of a bunfight: "It's a great honour. I'm nervous, but in my heart I feel real honour. Just being nominated is like a win for me! Yea, it's my second time with a nomination so I kinda know how it all works. But I still feel nervous 'bout the whole scene, man."

Perhaps surprisingly for a Zydeco Creole player, Ledet was born in the neighbouring state of Texas. Originally from Houston, he moved to the small town of Parks, Louisiana, as a kid and from there developed a growing interest in the local culture, its language variants, its food and including its boisterous music. In addition, Ledet had strong family links in the Zydeco state, spending many summers with his relatives while listening to the local music from a very early age. Initially a drummer, like other family members, Ledet immersed himself in all things Creole, with Zydeco a growing outlet and inspiration for his personal musical tastes. By the early age of ten, he was playing drums with Texan band, Wilbert Thibodeaux and the Zydeco Rascals, a grounding that was to prove a true game-changer for the music-hungry youngster.

Playing around Texas with Thibodeaux's outfit, Ledet graduated to playing the standard, most important principal instrument in the Zydeco musical world, the accordeon and squeezebox. Now, thirty years or so down the line, he looks back and shrugs about the time, seeing it as a stepping-stone to a career as a leading musician in the southern states. As he graduated from high-school many years ago, Ledet felt the need to move and settle in his adopted state of Louisiana in the very heart of Zydeco country, a move that he views as essential and which drew him into the entire Zydeco/Cajun/Creole culture.

"Typically, I have a band with six members. That's a good sound and a good manageable size for touring"

Ledet comes from a musical background with parents and grandparents who were heavily involved in the actual shaping of sectors of US musical history, as he explains: "My father was always a musician and his own grandfather, my great grandfather, was deeply involved in jazz as it developed here in the States. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, he was a bass player. He was in the mix with the likes of Louis Armstrong and Bunk Johnson, pioneers in the music. Then my grandfather, he was a jazz drummer who joined the band of Zydeco legend, Clifton

Chenier. Back then, Clifton was a solo player though often playing with only a washboard player. When he decided to go for a full band, my grandfather joined as his first drummer. So, I was always surrounded by music, I guess!"

When I suggest music must be in his blood, he laughs and agrees: "Yea, we always had music around the house, all kinds. My uncles were drummers, cousins all played jazz; sax players, keys, drums, everybody and everything. My mother played too. She played with Ike & Tina Turner, my cousin also played with Louis Armstrong. It just goes on and on. Another played with BB King, another with Albert Collins; so, lately I been thinking about that and you're right in saying I had no real alternative but to be a musician. It's no wonder why I love music so much! Since I was a child, that's just me!"

When I tell Corey that we recently featured an interview with Louisana Zydeco guy, Dwayne Dopsie, he laughs and adds: "My grandfather played with Rockin' Dopsie, Dwayne's father!"

So, does he see Zydeco as part of the blues music spectrum, I venture?: "Well, it is. It comes from the heart and the soul. I think that's what all good music must have, heart and soul. Blues

"I work like that, you just feed off the audience. There's a real energy"

has a feel, Zydeco has it too. Though with Zydeco you could say that it's definitely a happy music. You know, it makes your soul smile. It takes your worries away. That's what it was pretty much designed to do when Clifton really created it. If you were poor, or struggling just to survive maybe, every day a grind, then Zydeco has a vitality that helps give you a smile. It's music that I always say is snappy; snappy and happy! Music that means you just can't keep still around!"

Covid has turned everything on its head for musicians the world over. Ledet confirms he has been badly hit by the virus: "Last year, or in 2019, I was booked out for the year (2020) then it came along and everything just shut down. Then, 2020 as numbers seemed to start going down, it began to look possible again. But then over here, numbers began to creep up and things shut down again so two years in a row being laid-off and nobody knew nothing. Still the case, nobody know when it gonna be over, when we maybe get back out there. I had to go out find a job just to survive. Lots of musicians here in the USA had to do that, get a job." And, I ask, what about venues closing for good perhaps on the back of the pandemic: "Yea, a real worry. It's gonna happen, there'll be less chances, nowhere to play!"

Turning to the new album, which I absolutely love, Ledet hopes he can manage some promotional work: "We're just gonna keep on out there, we're gonna promote it. Maybe use more social media and internet stuff but we just gotta do whatever we can to get it out there! Music's just not gonna stop. I'm not gonna stop. That's just how it is, how it's gotta be! The day we stop is the day they take us and put us in the ground," he roars with laughter.

Having personally caught his buddy, Dwayne Dopsie, play live at French blues festivals in recent years, I refer to his usual way of jumping down from the stage and working his way through the crowd playing his accordeon, a real crowd-pleaser: "I work like that, you just feed off the audience. There's a real energy. If the crowd is into it, and the energy is just flowing, there's no telling what we can do! That crowd energy comes back at you big-time," he says with a laugh.

Looking back over his career, Ledet is happiest when he's out on the road but when I suggest that perhaps being based in Louisiana, the home of Zydeco, he seldom has to travel outside as a gigging musician, he quickly corrects me: "Well, there's sure a lot of places to play here but just next door, in Houston, Texas, three hours down the road, lots of Louisiana people moved there so there's always gigs there. And I just love travelling. I've played Saulieu (a leading French Zydeco & Cajun Festival) a bunch of times, I've toured in the Netherlands, Switzerland. I mean, all over. Typically, I have a band with six members. That's a good sound and a good manageable size for touring, especially when flying, travelling overseas!"

On his new Grammy nominated album, Ledet wrote the music and some tracks are done in a local Louisiana Creole dialect, something he is clearly delighted to have introduced to the mix and a departure from the usual French language base of the genre: "It's a language that like all our parents and grandparents here knew. It's part of me. It was something that if our parents, say, didn't want us to know, to understand what they were talking about, they'd use the language. So I'm still learning it really but I thought it was worth adding it to the music, that way it's recorded and it's a big part of who I am and what I do."

coreyledet.com

Elles BAILEY

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

Bristol singer songwriter, bandleader, keyboard player Elles Bailey has made a huge impact on the British blues and roots scene in recent years. A lot has happened since she last spoke with Blues Matters in the lockdown months including becoming a mother and touring live again after so long away from her natural habitat, the stage. Her third album 'Shining In The Half Light' is released, ten original songs recorded in Devon in December 2020.

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Alan Dunkley (opening spread) & Rob Blackham**

This sees her music evolve and showcases the talents of fellow band members Joe Wilkins on guitar, Jonny Henderson on keyboards, Matthew Waer on bass and Matthew Jones on drums.

Elles was driving home with her son Jasper when we started speaking, all is good in her life just now. We looked at highlights of the past year. "It's been a pretty mega year considering no one quite expected 2021 to continue like the year 2020 had! Number one highlight is having a baby. Jasper is now eight months old; he's crawling, he's standing. I'm on my way back from my guitarist Joe's place, where we were listening to the final test pressing of the new album. Joe's done up his lovely house and Jasper was climbing onto the shelves and knocked over a plant, I was so mortified, there was mud all over the place!"

Making the new record is a highlight but this was made in 2020. "I was six and a half months pregnant when we made the album, I'm very proud of this album. Highlight three has been getting out on the road and getting through the dates, still three to go, touch wood they all go as planned. You never know, in this day and age!" Touring has been difficult, especially other countries, she had been asked via message when she was doing an America tour. "Going to America and concerts maybe not even happening, as an independent artist I can't even think about that. Everything just now is on a wing and a prayer, I'm just thankful".

So, motherhood and musical career, how it's going so far..." We're still living with my parents. I won't have Grandparents on tap as I have done. I struggle, as I run the label I am on. November has been the busiest touring schedule. I turned down a record deal. When I did this, I had to release this one myself. If the right deal came along, I would have taken it! I have to make this release chart eligible. It meant I had to build a new pre-order website. Looking at ways of getting the album fulfilled by a proper fulfillment company not just me, my husband and my mother-in-law. It's been tricky, every night I'm not on the road I've worked late at night. Then you wake up and be a mum and when he sleeps, I work. November has been very hard but filled with many blessings as well!"

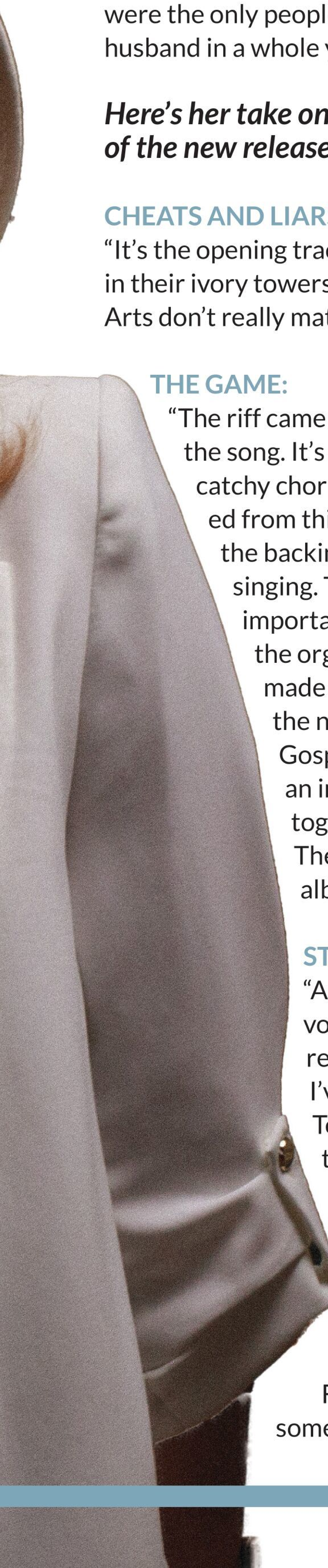
Elles never actually mentioned being on stage as work. "Physically, it is hard work and after not doing it for so long; growing a baby and having a baby, my core is shot to bits. Walking on stage I felt I've forgotten how to support my voice. It took a long time to get my stamina back. I did six dates in eight days and got through it! You have to try and sing safely. We were some of the lucky ones, we got to play in between lockdown 1 &2. October 2020, we played Southampton and Crawley. But after lockdown 3, was Love Rocks Festival in June. There was a multitude of emotions. Firstly, I live in the middle of nowhere in the country. The only people I see is when I go shopping in Waitrose, that's the local supermarket, very middle class! Arriving at a music festival with a two-month baby having not played a note for four months and not being on stage for ten months, it was insane. To be honest, I was rub-

bish. The band were so good and the audience so forgiving. I forgot all the words; it was a very emotional thing!"

We chatted about the successes she had putting live streams on during lockdown. "There's still a place for live streams. The pandemic has highlighted how important it is to make music accessible".

The title of the new album is 'Shining In The Half Light. "What I loved was watching fans connect with each other, that I found inspiring. A fan of mine from Ireland became friends with someone in Amsterdam and they came to watch my show at The Garage in London, and it was the first time they met. Had the pandemic not happened they wouldn't have met each other. We've got to cling on to the silver linings that's how we'll get through. That's exactly what this album is all about, spreading hope in a time of hopelessness!"

"I was due to make this record in Nashville in May 2020. That couldn't happen. I knew playing-wise, I have a first-class band over here, I knew I could make a great sounding record. I wanted a producer to steer the ship. It was a random moment, someone recommended Dan Weller. He'd worked with an Engineer I knew for years so I reached out to Clint Murphy, I told him about Dan Weller who had produced - enter Shikari to produce my record. Dan was going through a busy period, I told him we had to get this done before Christmas as I was six and a half months pregnant. We finished tracking the band on the 23rd of December. I have a good working relationship with Dan. I felt the whole process was really beautiful, stress free, considering the time we made it in. We isolated for



two weeks before. We got to make a record where we were not socially distanced, we could all be in the same room together and feel the music, it was a very special moment. The band were the only people I hugged other than my husband in a whole year".

Here's her take on the titles of the new release:

CHEATS AND LIARS:
"It's the opening track and is about the folks in their ivory towers who made us feel like the Arts don't really matter, and to go and retrain! "

THE GAME:
"The riff came first; it carries on through the song. It's always good to have a catchy chorus. The one thing we wanted from this album is we didn't want the backing singers to just be backing singing. That was going to be as important as the bass, the drums the organ and main vocal. Before I made Road I Call Home, I wanted the next one to be covered in Gospel vocals. Izo Fitzroy is an incredible artist, she put together an array of singers. There's a lot of joy through the album",

STONES:
"A dirty sounding song, my vocals are so gritty. We recorded this album to tape I've never done this before. To get the grit on my vocals, they ran my vocals through a Fender Champ and cranked everything else up to eleven. They did a mixture of the clean Nashville take and gritty sound through this amp. For me the message is something particular. It's very relatable to certain situations. If you live in a glasshouse…"

COLOURS START TO RUN:
"This is my, be careful what you wish for song. I wrote this in May 2019. I'd been touring for ages, from Czech Republic to Scotland. By the time we got there I was knackered. I wanted to spend some time with my husband. Then the world stopped a year later. This is a song where I can take a breath."

DIFFERENT KIND OF LOVE:
"Wrote this with Martin Harley. We finished this "virtually." This is something you wouldn't expect from either of us. This was the hardest song to record vocally. We did it on a day when Jasper was pummelling my diaphragm. It was so hard. With an Elles Bailey record I'm going to jump over all genres. It's a sweet simple song and universal."

WHO'S THAT:
I wrote this in 2018. It's about fighting our demons and how you deal with them."

SUNSHINE CITY:
"This is a fun song. It was written with Matt Owens of the band Noah And The Whale. It's about my hometown Bristol and letting your hair down. Revelling in a bit of Hedonism. It was inspired by a night out with Tamara Stewart where I went to watch Phil King and Joe Wilkins play in Stokes Croft, and we had red wine, beer, and shots of Tequila. Tamara went home. I should have but couldn't. Ended wakening in the dog's bed at 4 am at home! Losing all my inhibitions that's what the song is about."

HALFWAY HOUSE:
"This is where the backing singing comes into its own. I'll let the listener decide whether it's about heartbreak or Brexit. Could you argue that they are the same thing! This song took a different turn. It's based around the guitar sound and backing singers."

RIDING OUT THE STORM:
"It's written with Joe Wilkins. It's about the highs and lows in a relationship and finding that thread that gets you through it!"

SHINING IN THE HALF LIGHT:
"I wrote this with Craig Lackey. It was written over a zoom call. Craig was on guitar, and I was on piano. It was written during lockdown 1. It's about music being like a drug. Then this has been taken away. We all had to go cold turkey overnight. I brought the idea to him of, you're sitting there playing music in front of a screen and knowing there are a load of people that you can't see. That's the closest I get to pandemic times in this album. Someone asked, if I had the talent, you should write about this time because we're all experiencing these times. I found it hard to talk about this. It's the first time I've talked about an experience that's shared by the whole world. We've not all been in the same boat, but we have been in the same storm! I enjoy telling people how I write songs, for example Wild Wild West was about being screwed over by a con artist. But when you're suddenly writing about a collective experience there's a whole new responsibility to take on. I found it easy to vocalise in a song but not talking about it. When you're on the road you don't want to use the word, pandemic. I've come out of it, made a record, had a baby and I know a lot of people have not. It's about being empathetic to those going through heartache."

"Best advice musically, music isn't easy you have to take the rough with the smooth. Work hard I suppose although that doesn't sound very creative. We'll be doing as much touring as we can. I made an E.P. not sure when this will be released. Writing songs for another new album. Finally going on Blues Cruise Autumn 2022! Going to Norway and Germany too."

I had a fan tell me their daughter who is eight always wants to put on Elles Bailey's Wildfire on vinyl. We're getting the blues out there to a new audience!

Last word goes to Elles. "The UK and Europe, you've been a massive champion to me, thanks for taking me on when I jump from genre to genre. This has been the first interview about the new release. Thanks very much!"

www.ellesbailey.com

SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME

UNRELEASED MASTERS & DEMOS FROM THE BRITISH BLUES YEARS 1963 - 1976

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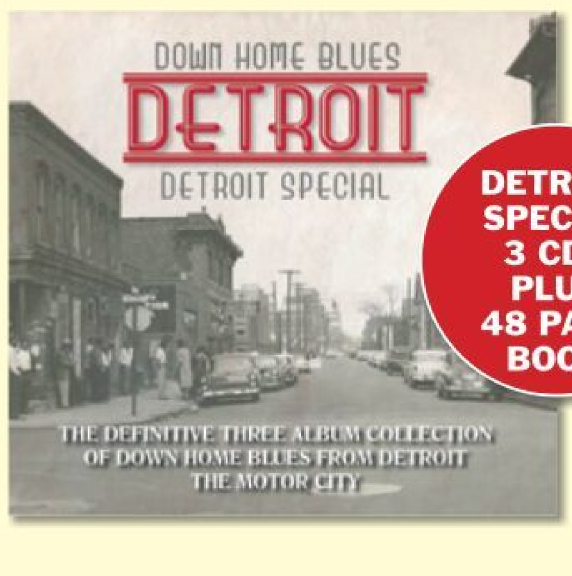

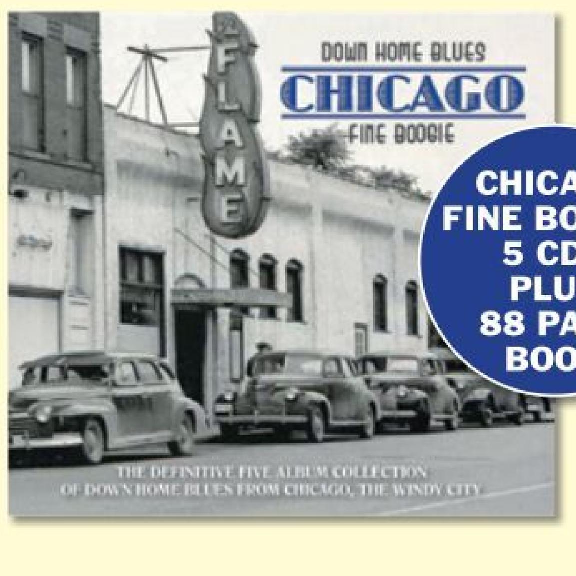

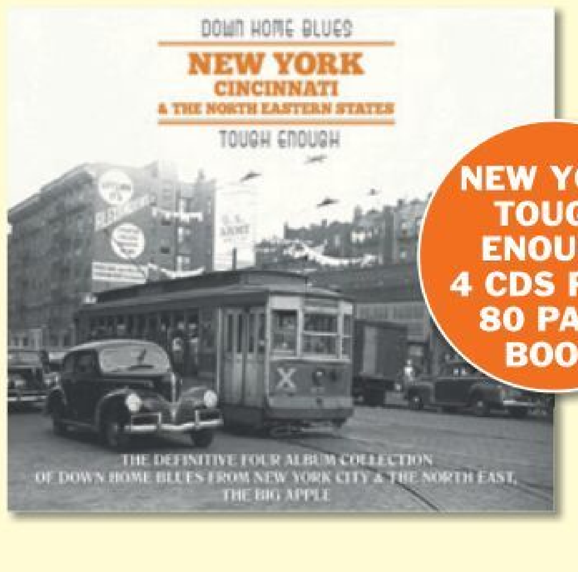

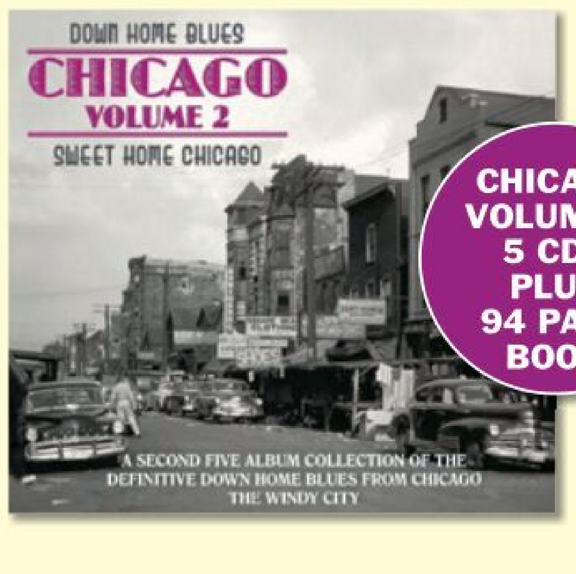

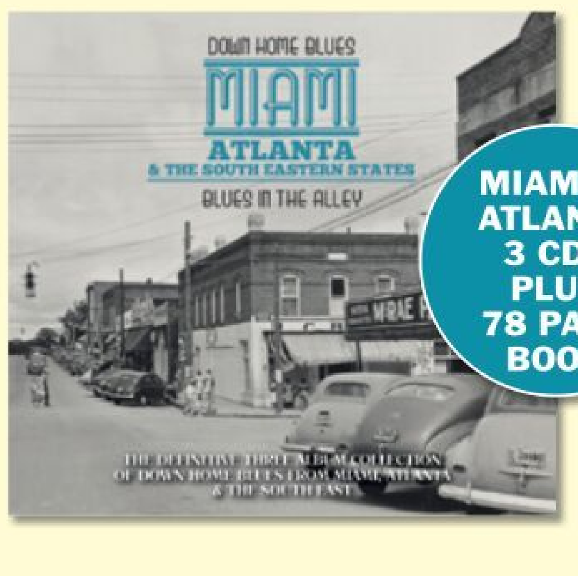

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THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

ELLY WININGER

by **Tim Arnold** Images: **Jeff Faisano & Jayne Toohey**

Leadbelly. Skip James. Cisco Houston. Blind Willie Johnson. Vera Hall. Woody Guthrie. LIghtnin' Hopkins. Mississippi John Hurt. And on it goes. Legendary inspirations for a six-year old who learned how to play guitar on a child-sized Harmony acoustic her parents bought her at a church-yard sale when she was a young "Upper West Side red diaper baby - which is what they called us kids back then whose parents were lefties … commies … civil rights activists."

So sayeth Elly Wininger, this ageless white Jewish bubbe from upstate New York, a NY Blues Hall of Fame inductee (2014) whose latest album, "The Blues Never End" (Earwig, 2021) is a blues-roots, chart-climbing hit.

"I'm the only acoustic guitar player on the charts right now," she tells me in a recent conversation before adding, "My parents had such a great collection of Folkways Records which I listened to when I was so young. I thought Cisco Houston and Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly's stuff was baby music (other Folkways recordings included Peet Seeger, Sonny Terry and topics like "The (Lee Harvey) Oswald Case," "Songs of a Lesbian Anarchist" and Playing Music for Animals").

"Then I got a round-necked Resonator guitar – the kind with the hubcap in the middle - and started playing some slide. People told me years later that I sounded just like Blind Willie Johnson. So I said, who's that? And checked him out and realized that's what I was listening to as a tot. "Dark Was the Night" … I knew every note of it, without knowing it was Blind Willie Johnson. I wasn't trying to sound like him. It just came out that way."

"At that moment I had this kind of visceral experience … like, oh my God, this stuff is in my blood. "I was immersed in it … although I really didn't get it back then. It took me a while to figure out what 'it' was."

And she did. And took it down one of those roads less traveled. When Elly was growing up Jews had little access to the WASP-controlled mass communications industry – but "the music business was wide open for Jews as it was for Blacks. Jews played a key role in developing and popularizing African-American music, including rhythm and blues," particularly the independent record business. By the mid-50's they owned or managed some 40% of the independent companies recording and distributing rock-and-roll and 'race' music, as it was called back then. Chess, National Records, King, Savoy, Apollo, Atlantic, Specialty, Aladdin,

Fortune Records, Scepter et al.

Jerry Wexler, who coined the phrase ‘rhythm and blues,’ and Jerry Leiber, who wrote many classic soul and R&B songs with partner Mike Stoller, identified with blacks and black culture. Many of the songs that informed the early harmonizing of black groups who sang doo-wop emanated from Jewish artists and composers based in the Brill Building, on Broadway in mid-town Manhattan, including Leiber and Stoller, Carole King, Cynthia Weil and Ellie Greenwich.

I asked Elly Wininger about this Jewish-Black sympatico in the birth of the rhythm that is the blues. “Jews and Black people have a lot in common,” she tells me. “Persecution, other cultures trying to obliterate them. We were slaves, too - to the Pharaoh. The classic gospel song, ‘Wade in the Water,’ is about Jews escaping slavery in Egypt:”

‘See that band all dressed in white
It look like a band of the Israelites …
See that band all dressed in red…
Look like a band that Moses led
God is gonna trouble these waters.’

“That’s me,” Elly says. “That’s my tribe. How could we not relate to the black experience?

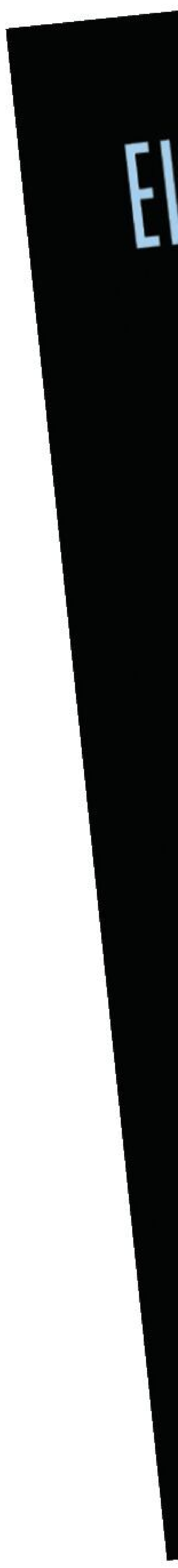
“Anyway, back then Jewish children had to take music lessons. So I did. Piano. Violin – which I hated. I finally took some guitar lessons. I could read music – but I didn’t need to. I felt it. I also went to the Manhattan School of Music for arranging,” A feature which is evident in much of her work.

Plug in “The Blues Never End” and give it a listen. Elly Wininger will take you to a place the old scratchy vinyl discs once did, inspired by her legendary influences - and brings it up way past today to a head and heart space you know is in there but just can’t find.

Covers include Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s version

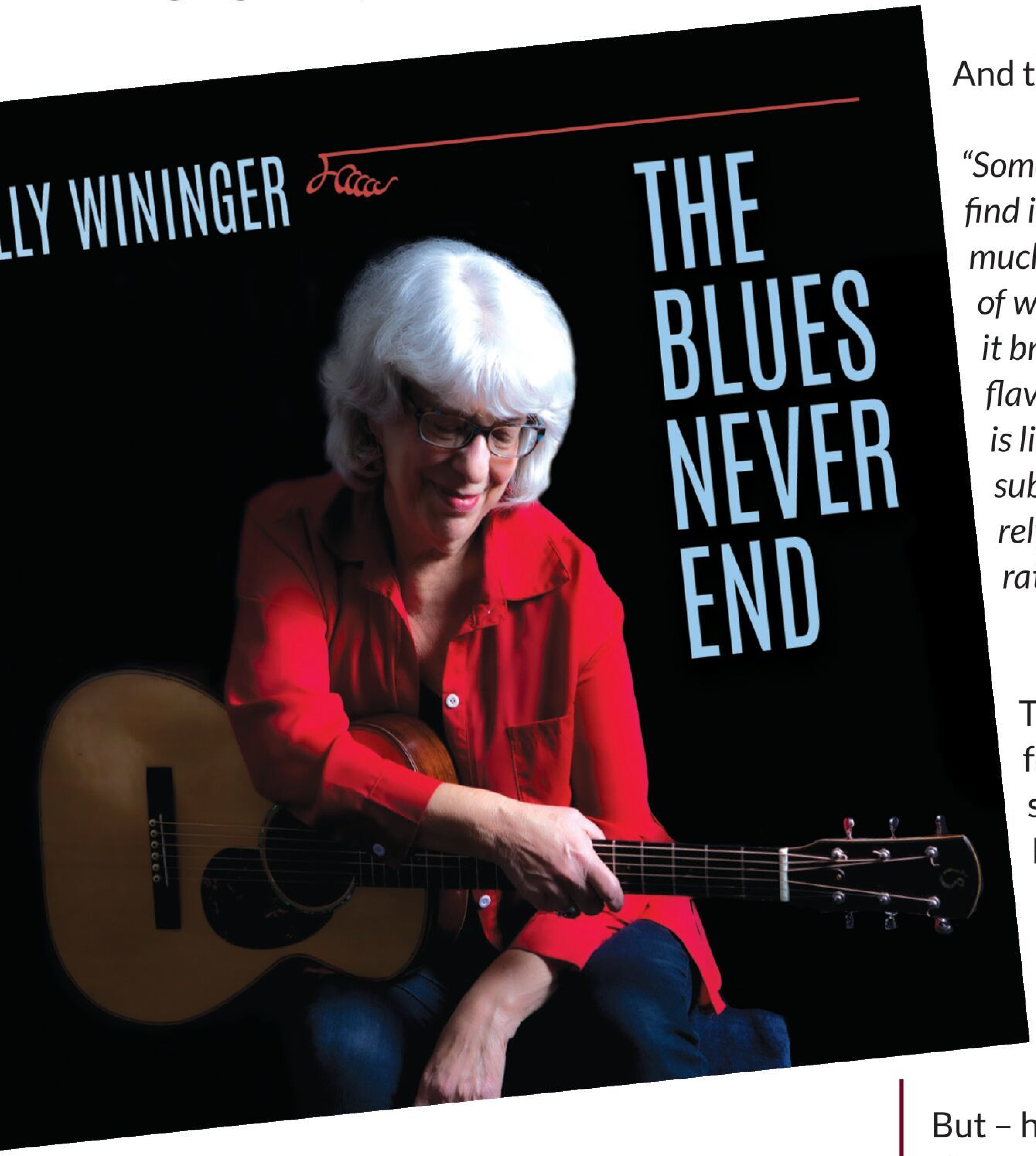
of the traditional “Let That Liar Alone;” Skip James’ hometown Mississippi “Special Rider Blues;” Blind Lemon Jefferson and Huddie Ledbetter’s “Black Snake Moan” (“A Dixieland band brought this to life for me” – from Elly’s artists notes); Texas Alexander and Lonnie Johnson’s “Range in my Kitchen” (“sure seems like a woman should be signing this one”); Ledbetter’s “Old Riley;” Blind Willie Johnson on “God Moves on the Water” (Blind Willie’s got to be one of the spookiest and most unique artists ever”); Tony Joe White’s “As the Crow Flies” (“I stripped this one down to the rural roots I heard”); and Greeshie Wiley’s “Skinny Legs Blues” (“I left out the verse about her slitting a guy’s throat”).

Ain’t a straight-ahead Chicago blues 1-4-5 arrangement on this album. It’s all stuff that just comes out of her in honest, heart-felt expressions of … life. Her pipes are warm, rich and genuine. Insistent. And comforting. Her National Steel guitar pickin underscores much



of it with an honest, unpretentious soul rare in today's commercial 'blues' releases.

The other cuts are pure Elly originals: the title track "The Blues Never End;"; "(I Wanna Be Like) Rosie" ("My paean to Zydeco accordion player and songwriter Rosie Ledet"); and "Right Kind of Trouble" ("I envision Jessica Rabbit signing this …").



And the reviews describe her work this way:

"Ellie Wininger is two wonderful things: a throwback to the golden age of folk and blues artists of the 1960's and'70's, and a contemporary singer/songwriter whose music is just as vital and engaging now as it was a half-century ago. She has an effortless, fluid guitar style with vocals to match."

- Blues Roadhouse

"All the original numbers on this album glow like a white dress in a nightclub."

- Cascade Blues Association

"The most striking thing about Elly Wininger is how warm and appealing a singer she is … In addition to her fervent singing, her crisp guitar playing has a flowing quality evocative of the Piedmont blues and Mississippi John Hurt … superb slide guitar … "

- Jazz & Blues Report

And this one …

"Sometimes you open a bottle of wine, take a sip, find it enjoyable, and finish the glass without too much thought. Other times, you open a bottle of wine, are taken in by the aroma, decide to let it breathe, take a taste and savor the complex flavors. The Blues Never Ends by Elly Wininger is like that. (Her) acoustic guitar playing … subtle rather than gritty, complex rather than relying on power and repetition, and elegant rather than crude."

- The Holler, Colorado Blues Society

Then there's "Alabama Blues," one of the four originals on her latest album, and it says everything you need to know about Elly Wininger. Listen to the music. A lulling riff that captures the essence of everything good about the "old blues." Engaging vocals. Flirtatious guitar pickin and strummin.

But – hear her words. She takes on an explosive, politicized issue that is at the very heart of women's rights. Choice. The right to choose an abortion. Quoting Anni Piper from the Cascade Blues Association, "Her lyrics are a scathing indictment of the restrictions that are being placed on access to abortion, and she also references incest as the reason for needing the procedure. This song could not be more relevant right now. Wininger's boldness and courage in tackling these issues in her art, in the context of an America that's as divided as a quotient, has to be commended."

"I was really angry when I wrote this song," from Elly. "Still am."

I thought we had this figured out.
I thought there was a law
Protecting girls who'd been raped
By a stranger or their pa.
But now it seems we've travelled back-
I heard it on the news.
Stuck here with the Alabama Blues.
Those stinkin backward Alabama Blues

"The blues is a visceral experience. This stuff is in my blood," Elly tells me.

And she bleeds in many colors … she was the very first artist CBGB's (Country, Blue Grass and Blues) booked on opening night in 1973 down in Greenwich Village, NYC, and was offered a recording contract at the sweet young age of 16. So she starts cutting school and hanging out, listening to the likes of Muddy, Lightnin Hopkins and Dave Van Ronk. Since then she's done a Clio award-winning public service campaign against drunk driving, hosts the podcast show, "Catskill Cabaradio," and has created "Our Song," a program used by many organizations to assist people of all ages and abilities in writing their own songs.

Blues roots.
"The old blues artists had a unique sound and style. We've lost a bit of that today. Lot of today's stuff is straight ahead Chicago blues. Very repetitive. Not original. Nobody sounds like Skip James these days. Can't even come close."

Elly does. She's the real deal.
Her work says it all.

"You know how you tell a poser? They're playing an electric guitar and they make this face before they hit the note … so they're headed up to some high, wailing choke note, and screw up their face and then hit the note. You know they're full of shit …

"And if you publish any of this, Tim … I'll get trashed," and I'm thinking since when does truth get trashed? (And we're publishing it with her permission).

All of this is at the foundation of her most recent effort, an expressive, politically-motivated single release, "January 6," about, yeah, January 6…

Some of us saw it coming
Some of us looked the other way
Some of us thought this could never happen
Not here in the USA.
No matter what you believe in
No matter where you stand
You're gonna remember
Just where you were
And what you were doing
When the shit hit the fan.

Once a lie gets rolling
Like a snowball down a hill
Picking up dirt, picking up speed
Keeps on rolling until
Some people start to believe it
Just 'cause they wish it were true
With alternate facts
They make their attacks and their plans
And the shit hits the fan.
Just takes one schemer who knows how
To spread hate and lies though a crowd.

This bubbe kicks some serious ass. The truth. So, you wanna jump, jive and wail? Pour yourself some Rebel Yell, neat, and crank up one of Joe Bonamassa's million sellers. Or, wanna find what's really inside your ownself? Down deep? Uncork that bottle of wine and take a walk down that road less traveled with Elly Wininger's "The Blues Never End."
You may never want to come back.

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JOHN
MAYALL
KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE

John Mayall needs absolutely no introduction to Blues Matters readers and blues-lovers everywhere. Now aged eighty-eight – yup, 88! – he has been a true global blues music legend for the past three score years at least! Heading towards ninety, almost a century, Mayall is finally – and it seems almost reluctantly – on the verge of retiring from the music maelstrom that has been his life for so long. We caught up again with John at home in LA's famed Laurel Canyon for a chat about his astonishing life and career.

by **Iain Patience** Images: **David Gomez (posed) & Arnie Goodman (live)**

John Mayall needs absolutely no introduction to Blues Matters readers and blues-lovers everywhere. Now aged eighty-eight – yup, 88! – he has been a true global blues music legend for the past three score years at least! Heading towards ninety, almost a century, Mayall is finally – and it seems almost reluctantly – on the verge of retiring from the music maelstrom that has been his life for so long. We caught up again with John at home in LA's famed Laurel Canyon for a chat about his astonishing life and career.

Mayall has a new album on Forty Below Records due for release towards the tail-end of January 2022. 'The Sun Is Shining Down' is a ten-track offering produced by his friend and long-time producer, Eric Corne, a guy who knows just how to get the best out of John and blues music generally. Joined on the album by many great players, the album features help from Melvin Taylor, Marcus King, Scarlet Rivera and Americana giant, Buddy Miller, plus the surprising addition of Hawaiin ukulele master, Jake Shimabukuro, Mike Campbell and Mayall's until recently, band-member and guitarist, Carolyn Wonderland. Mayall's current band with Greg Rzab on bass, and Jay Davenport, drums, with Carolyn Wonderland feature as the basic backstop to what is likely to be his final recording. In reality, this final album is an absolute cracker, one that stacks up strongly as a contender for his best ever realease. Whatever else might be said about it, it is clear that Mister Mayall is bowing out on a huge musical high!

With a huge back-catalogue of albums numbering around thirty-seven studio plus a similar number of live recordings – not to mention countless compilations – it is interesting to discover just what initially inspired the man to turn to music in the first place as a kid in the north of England. His father was a keen musician with an interest in jazz and early US blues, so Mayall heard many greats on disc at home before teaching himself guitar, keys and harp. He recalls being in love with US music of the era and when he eventually moved out to live in the States around forty years ago, felt like he was 'coming home,' to the land that had been his initial musical muse and inspiration.

As we look back, I ask John what first triggered his ambition to become a blues musician and he immediately smiles and says: "Alexis Korner was the one that started off the blues movement and that was what I was interested in. I had been playing for a while, but that's when I moved south, to London. I had two jobs for the first year, as a graphic artist during the day and gigs at night. That's how it was until there were enough gigs to be able to give up the rest of it," he explains.

So, I query, what clubs do you remember back then, and did you have a favourite place to play?: "The main clubs back then were the Marquis Club and the Flamingo. Those two were near to each other but they booked different types of music. But they were all jazz and blues though. My favourite would probably be the

Gibson

Flamingo. They had the all-nighters there and it was also a little rougher," he says with a dry chuckle.

Of course, back then, John was known as frontman and band-leader with his Bluesbreakers, a band that literally changed the face of the UK blues scene almost single-handedly. Countless gigs saw the band perform throughout, UK, Europe and the USA with forays into Australia and everywhere there was a demand for blues music. But it's inevitably the number of musicians that basically saw their own careers flourish when working with John that often spring independently to mind. The names are an absolute treasure trove of world blues music: Mick Fleetwood, founder of now legendary outfit, Fleetwood Mac. This band alone, of course, nurtured so many giants and, again, John Mayall was hugely influential with the start-up career of its greatest guitarist, the nowadays absolutely revered, late Peter Green. Green was a giant and left an astonishing legacy but in reality almost certainly owed his own career to John who gave him his first true airings in the modern music world.

The list of great musicians who passed through the band seems endless: Mick Taylor, a guy who went on to play for a while with the Rolling Stones; Walter Trout, still out there as a leading bluesman; Buddy Whittington, another global blues favourite whom John remains in touch with and told me is a 'great player and friend.' Lately, Carolyn Wonderland is the first female to play in the band. Although she features on John's latest album, she herself has gone out as a solo artist now signed to leading US blues label, Alligator, where her debut solo album, 'Tempting Fate' is already making waves. John adds his thoughts on his first female band member: "Carolyn has been fabulous.I can't remember any other female musicians that I was hoping to bring in in earlier years. She has been with me for a while now and she's wonderful, a great musician and lovely person. This line-up has been with me for a long time now and it works really well. Carolyn has been a central part of that. I don't really know exacty what she does when she's off on her own, but she really does a wonderful job on my new album. I'm so pleased with it."

Against this background and history, one absolute giant always stands out, with a Bluesbreakers album that is now a byword for John Mayall and his own stunning and stellar career - Eric Clapton and the so-called 'Beano Album.' As we chat about those early days, I ask how he found players, did they come by recommendation, were they people John had seen play and wanted in the band, or by chance, I wonder?: "A bit of both, really. I never had any difficulty. I don't recall ever having any problems searching for people. They were all around on the London scene and I was able to choose the ones that I wanted," he says.

We go on to explore the theme in more detail and John considers the various players and the differing styles each brought to the mix: "I think Eric (Clapton) was the first one that had some idea of what the blues was all about but there were others that came along in later years." He smiles at the recollection before adding: "There are so many of them. It's not really possible to choose favourites. They all had their own style and it was fun for me as a bandleader to pick musicians that I enjoyed listening to."

John warms to the theme and goes on to recall those who have played with him over the decades: "Eric was only with me for about a year, and during that time he would occasionally disappear and not show up for a gig, but other than that he was one of the best guitarists that I've worked with. There were quite a few blues guitarists that were playing original stuff, but he had a more noticeable style. What stood out to me about him was that he had a really great tone and way of interpreting a song."

"Peter Green was also with me for about the same length of time as Eric, about a year. He

Roland

EXIT

was very talented and had a lot of energy with his interpretation of songs. He was a very important person in blues then that people were beginning to understand."

Next, he considers drummer Mick Fleetwood, almost a footnote as he had a short spell with the band: "Mick was only in the band for about three months. He was a very good, uncomplicated performer. He loved what he was doing and he was a great addition to the band at that time," he explains.

Walter Trout remains a firm friend and is clearly warmly recalled: "Walter was with me for longer and he was sharing the guitar spot with Coco Montoya. They were both very talented performers who pushed each other on stage. They were both very enjoyable to work with. I just (recently) did some shows with Walter and it was a real treat to get to hang out with him and play together again."

Buddy Whittington also comes to mind: "Buddy was with me for the longest time of any guitarist, I think. He had a very individual style and was a really easy person to work with. I always enjoyed what he came up with."

Mick Taylor, of course, went on to join the greatest rock'n roll band ever, The Stones, following a spell with the Bluesbreakers: "Mick was a very unusual player in that if he felt like playing he would really excel but other times he would take it for granted. He was a very talented musician and still is today," he adds.

Having been recording and working with the music for such a length of time, I express my curiosity about what John thinks of the changes in recording processes and equipment, has it changed the sound for the better, does he enjoy studio work or prefer life on the road for example?: "Live stuff is always the best," he immediately confirms. "You can't always guarantee that it's going to sound the way you want it, but the results of actually performing are right there and you have the audience to add to the experience. Music has always changed with the times but there are always ways to capture what you're looking for. It's just been album after album, it's just really such a stack," he laughs as he looks back on his recording history. "You know, I don't really see where it all goes. I just make the music and see what then happens with it! It's just a joy to be able to make an album."

He points to the new album, The Sun Is Shining,' by way of example: "I'm very pleased with the way it has turned out. We went into the studio and it came together very well, almost easily. Jay, the drummer in the band, actually thinks it's the best album we've done together. So, we must have got something right," he says.

"Usually, I don't actually think about it all that much. I just get an idea for a song and there's usually a story behind it and I just go from there really. That process brings it together and I find keys usually the best way to write. Then when I feel the album's ready we head to the studio. I am very happy with it. I just do the best I can, always. Of course, it depends on the song. Sometimes I play harp, maybe keys or guitar – it depends on the song every time." And he adds that "I really enjoy what they all do," referring to the stellar line-up featuring on the new release.

With the pandemic currently scuppering opportunities for promotion in many ways, I ask if he expects to manage any promotional work with the album. His next few months and gigs around California are being billed as his 'final' gigs, so there could be some possibilities out there: "I don't really know. I think the Covid business has taken over everybody so you just have to wait and see what happens. I'm available, it's just something that I do!"

www.johnmayall.com

TINSLEY ELLIS
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

by **Adam Kennedy** Images: **Elaine Thomas Campbell (left) & Regan Kelly**

US bluesman Tinsley Ellis starts the New Year with the release of his latest album, 'Devil May Care' via Alligator Records. This is the singer, songwriter, and guitarist's landmark 20th studio album under his own name.

Tinsley's interest in guitar playing dates to the age of seven and the day he encountered The Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show. This was an event that inspired many would-be musicians. "I can remember sitting in the living room - my mom, dad, my younger sister and me. We sat there, and The Beatles came on. My dad said I think we should watch this. Everybody is talking about it on The Ed Sullivan Show," recalls Ellis.

"They started twanging and singing, and people were screaming. I said, that's it, that's what I want to do with my life. So, I'm blaming this whole thing on The Beatles. Everything that's gone on in my life, I blame it on them." Ellis describes how The Beatles had gone full circle. "All of us watching on television, hearing a band from far away playing music that came from here. Rhythm and blues – 'Twist and Shout' and The Isley Brothers. We had to hear it happen over there before we could appreciate it here."

Tinsley Ellis has spent a large part of his life touring, but these strange times have meant somewhat of a change of pace for the Atlanta-based artist. "Prior to the pandemic in March of 2020, I was on the road for over 40 years non-stop," explains Ellis. With a halt to touring, Tinsley refocused his plans: "I moped around for a week or two, and then I said, if I'm not careful, I'm going to lose my chops and my playing ability." Subsequently, the guitarist set himself a rigorous schedule. "I designated every morning from 7 am, or 8 am until noon, downstairs here in my studio as songwriting time. In just over a year, I wrote about 200 songs. I was able to choose from those to become the new album," explains Ellis. Somewhat of a highly

productive period for the bluesman.

Speaking about songwriting during the pandemic, Tinsley said: "Everything on this particular album came from scratch. Now - I've got so many songs that I still want to record from this bunch. It's probable that some of these songs will come out in the future on other albums." Although, this period of downtime was a double-edged sword. "There was an upside to this whole thing. But, a global pandemic, that's a damn high price to pay for creativity. I would choose to be less creative any day of the week," confirms Ellis.

The title of the new Tinsley Ellis album 'Devil May Care' is an interesting one. It immediately conjures up thoughts of the tale of Robert Johnson meeting the devil at The Crossroads. "I have used the word devil in a lot of my songs. I had 'To The Devil For A Dime'. On this album, 'Beat The Devil'. I had one called 'Must Be The Devil'. So that has been a common word. I like that word - it sings well, and it tells a story," explains Tinsley. "It has a throwback to the Robert Johnson myth. I'm always partial to that word." However, it was an intervention from Mother Nature that inspired the title. "There were some tornadoes going through Atlanta. This was about six or seven months ago. Big tornadoes and it was all over the news," recollects Ellis. "A friend of mine said - aren't you going to go and get down in the basement? I said, no - we're not going to do that. My friend said that's very devil may care of you - because that's the expression. And I said, oh - that is a great album title." The same phrase can be found in the song 'Viva Las Vegas' by Elvis Presley.

Some of the inspiration for 'Devil May Care' came from delving into archive recordings by the greats of the blues/rock world. "As I'm drinking my coffee and checking my emails, I would put on some music that I hadn't listened to in a while. Also, looking around on YouTube and finding old concert audio and sometimes video of BB King, the Allman Brothers, Mike Bloomfield, and Al Kooper," explains Ellis. Listening to each of these artists would give the songwriter food for thought.

Tinsley would regularly send demos recorded during the pandemic to the head of Alligator Records. "If it was good enough, I would send it up to Bruce Iglauer at Alligator. He would write me back with what he thought about it," recalls Ellis. "We started collecting the songs. He and I, both at the same time said it seems like it's time to go into the studio. We've got a nice collection of songs." Of course, the pair would deliberate over which tracks would make the final cut. "I had my ideas of which songs, and he had his ideas," said Ellis. "It wasn't my intention to have 'Beat The Devil' or '28 Days' and one other song. He said you need to do those songs. Those are really good songs. I had some other songs planned. We went back and forth and decided on which songs should be on the album."

> ***"he was doing a lot of that great guitar playing here in his home country - my home country, America, and nobody paid any attention"***

In 2021, Alligator Records celebrated its landmark 50th anniversary. Of course, there are many Alligator artists that Tinsley admires himself. "I was a huge fan of Roy Buchanan, Lonnie Mack, Johnny Winter and Albert Collins," says Ellis. However, there is one artist that resonated with Tinsley the most from the label's extensive roster. "I always come back to Son Seals. He never stopped, and he kept making great albums," said Ellis. "He was one of Alligator's first artists. There's something about Son Seals. When I wrote my song 'A Quitter Never Wins', that was very much me trying at my young best

to sound like Son Seals playing in a small bar in Chicago."

Tinsley Ellis has recorded albums on several different labels. One of which is Capricorn Records - famous for its connection with the Allman Brothers Band. "I always love blues music. But rock and roll is the music of the white kid growing up in the South that loves blues music," explains Ellis. "Rock and roll is my heritage. Blues is my love," The artist adds that: "Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac, and the Allman Brothers, they did what I always wanted to do. Mix my rock and roll, which I was born to play, with my blues, that I love."

One of the many stand out tracks on 'Devil May Care' is called "28 Days". The song has a distinctive Hendrix sound, particularly in the guitar playing. Recounting the initial demo of "28 Days," Tinsley states: "That song had me doing my Hendrix thing. I recorded the guitar in the basement with my Marshall amplifier, my Stratocaster, and my wah wah pedal. Just like he would use, and I was able to." An early intake of caffeine fuelled the recording. "I think I recorded that song at 7:30 am - the guitar part. The coffee was kicking in, and I was in my pyjamas. I was being Jimi Hendrix in my basement." However, the artist wasn't sure if he should submit the track to the label. "I thought, maybe I shouldn't send it because I don't know if I want to do this song," explains Ellis. "Bruce talked me into it. I'm glad he did. Bruce said - oh, you've got to do that. And I go, why? He said the guitar solo - that's some of the wildest stuff you've ever played."

Speaking about Hendrix's influence on himself, Tinsley said that: "He was such a game-changer.

It's interesting to me that he was doing a lot of that great guitar playing here in his home country - my home country, America, and nobody paid any attention. Then he went over to London, and suddenly he was a smash hit. Then he was able to come back here." Of course, Jimi Hendrix's move to the UK was catalysed by a member of The Animals. Tinsley adds: "What if Chas Chandler hadn't discovered Hendrix playing in Greenwich Village? What would have happened," a thought-provoking question for sure. "I think it was great that he had Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell with him to give it a kind of Cream sound. He loved that music." Tinsley states that: "I consider Jimi Hendrix to be either the last of the blues people from that era. Or the first of the psychedelic rock people from that era. He's sort of like the missing link."

As previously mentioned, having spent 40 years on the road, the artist is "very excited" about his forthcoming US tour. "This is the first album in 25 years that we're performing in its entirety live. We've worked on the whole album," confirms Ellis. "We have to choose the other songs to do in concert. Songs that I'm more known for over the years like 'A Quitter Never Wins' or 'Double Eyed Whammy'." Ellis concludes by stating that: "We're very excited about 'Devil May Care' and getting back on the road. Hopefully, getting back over to the UK because I haven't played there in 20 years - maybe more." Something to look forward to for British fans of the Georgia bluesman.

'Devil May Care' by Tinsley Ellis will be released on 21st January via Alligator Records.

www.tinsleyellis.com

BETH HART

A TRIBUTE TO LED ZEPPELIN

Mascot/ Provogue

When I first heard that Beth Hart was going to be doing a tribute album, I naturally thought it would be something along the lines of, Etta James, Billie Holiday, or Bessie Smith, to name but a few. But no, Led Zeppelin. Beth is no stranger to a Zeppelin song, she has performed as part of her live show, Whole Lotta Love on numerous occasions. A full album? It is an amazing album from the very first chord on the first song, Whole Lotta Love. This grabs you by the throat, not pinning you to the wall, but knocking you through the wall. I don't know of any other female artist that could pull this off on every track on the album. Searing vocals have never been a problem for Beth Hart, this is more than that, it's almost biblical. This is not just about her stepping into Robert Plant's shoes, this is about entering the world of Led Zeppelin.

Kashmir has long been muted as the best song that Zeppelin recorded, Beth decides to push it up a notch with a brooding melody that paints a familiar picture within a different frame.

> ***"this is more than that, it's almost biblical"***

She wrings every last drop of emotion out of the song, leaving me, a die-hard Zeppelin fan, almost lost for words. The Crunge and Dancing Days, not always the first choice on your Zeppelin playlist, have new life breathed into them, with When The Levee Breaks as part of a melody with Dancing Days. Now depending on what mood I'm in, depends on what I think is my favouruite Zeppelin track. When The Levee Breaks has been a big part of my life. Originally written by Memphis Minnie in 1929, with Kansas Joe McCoy providing vocals, it tells the tale of complete devastation in the deep south due to horrendous flooding creating such misery. Beth Hart takes this and elevates it to a place that even Zeppelin did not reach. This version left me wondering if this was meant to be sung by Beth Hart and not Zeppelin. Stunning version. The whole album is a masterpiece of epic proportions. Every musician connected with this album has helped to make it one of the greatest things that Beth Hart has ever done. Don't believe me? Just wait until you hear Black Dog. Masterful.

STEPHEN HARRISON

DAN PATLANSKY

SHELTER OF BONES

Virgin Music Label and Artist Services

Award-winning South-African blues rock guitarist Dan Patlansky has returned with his new record Shelter of Bones. The album was recorded over a three-year period from 2019 – 2021 with the global pandemic giving him not only time with his family but also time to think about the songs and how he wanted them to come across.

Enlisting the help of Tom Gatza from Hamburg, Germany on arrangements and production on three tracks they set to work in South African recording studios. Opener Soul Parasite is a commentary on the people who control the world and somehow are destroying it for their own interests.

It has tinges of Led Zeppelin with drummer Andy Maritz blending well with Dan Patlansky's vocals, guitar and bass. Snake Oil City is a particular favourite of mine with its gritty lyrics about a fictional place but inspired by the current South African government. Then we hear a tender side on I'll Keep Trying which is a ballad produced by Gatza that

"Shelter Of Bones is an exciting album that does not do the obvious"

showcases not only the high production values but the quality of the songwriting. Devil's Dopamine tells the listener of the perils of social media completely with groovy bass that puts me in the mind of Was Not Was at times. The airy arrangement for Sweet Memories provides space for the earworm chorus shine.

The title track closes the collection with Patlansky giving advice to his children as he is concerned with what they can expect when he is grown up. That is something I am sure that parents will understand and connect with. Overall, Shelter Of Bones is an exciting album that does not do the obvious as Dan Patlansky has worked hard at giving the material the time and breathing space and I feel that it has really paid off. An emotive and entertaining offering.

GLENN SARGEANT

ERIC GALES

THE CROWN

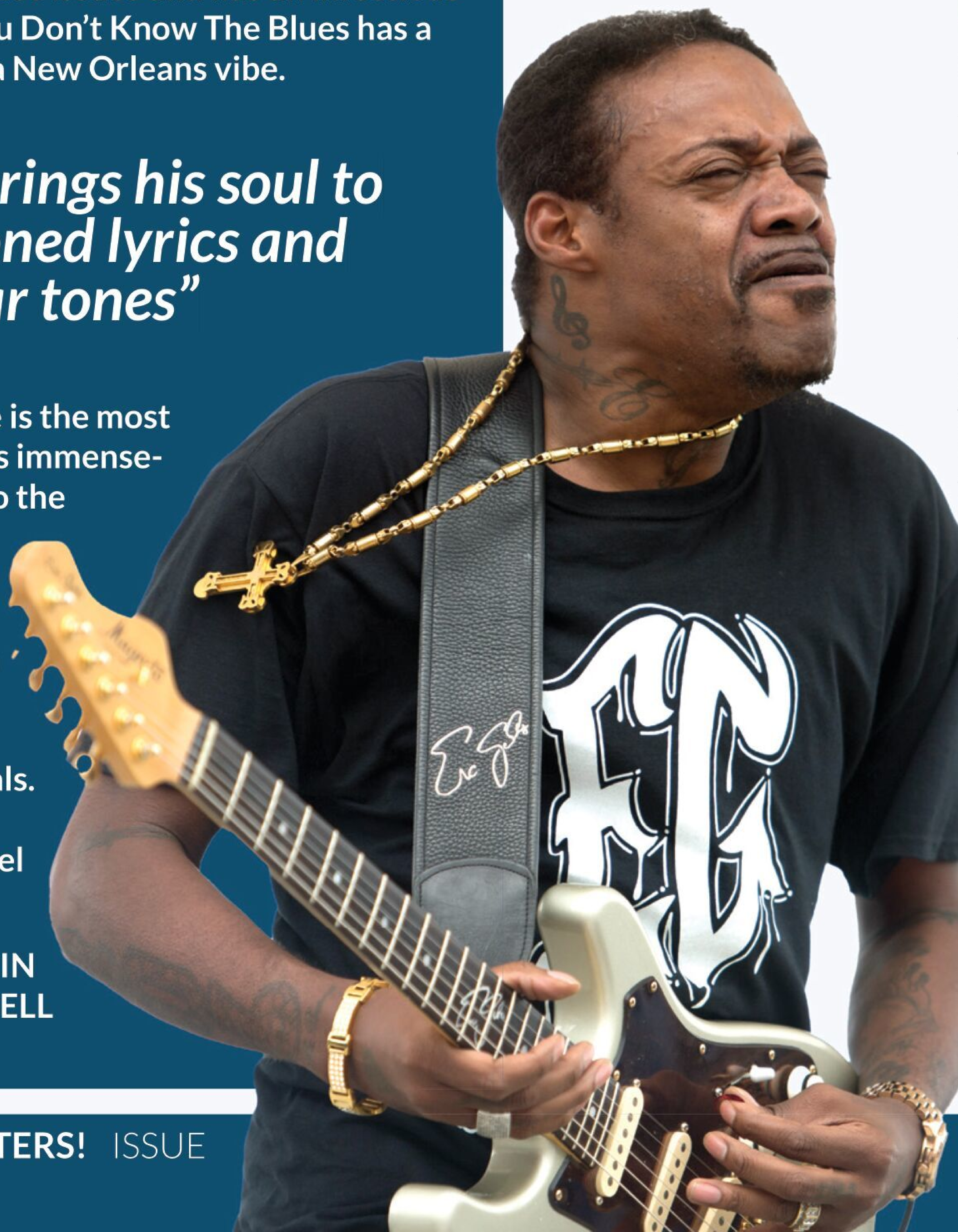
Provogue/Mascot Label

Playing for over thirty years; here Eric Gales brings his soul to the impassioned lyrics and driving guitar tones. This is a cathartic release; he shares his struggles with substance misuse that could have ruined him and brings a new creativity to these sixteen stunning tracks mixing blues, soul and rhythm and blues notations. Produced by Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith this reinforces the fact Eric is one true brilliant blues musician. Death Of Me starts with signature guitar playing with a rhythm section that glues this song, and the harmonies break into him rapping a self-reflective tune. The Storm touches on themes of racism and hope for a better world, slow melodic blues vibes throughout and peppered with horn section. Had To Dip is a shuffle but really a precursor to I Want My Crown, where he trades guitar licks with Joe Bonamassa on a song of hope and achievement, funky tones this just exudes total guitar mastering. Stand Up slackens the pace on a soulful delivery, just beautiful. Survivor deals with race issues and has an infectious chorus, anthemic. You Don't Know The Blues has a call and response to a New Orleans vibe.

"Eric Gales brings his soul to the impassioned lyrics and driving guitar tones"

Too Close To The Fire is the most honest song the lyrics immensely powerful. It adds to the different shades and tones of a magnificent release. Take Me Just As I Am features LaDonna Gales bringing more soul and soaring vocals. Last song, I Gotta Go bookends that live feel to his songs.

COLIN CAMPBELL



BEN LEVIN

STILL HERE

VIZZTONE

Cincinnati based Ben has just released his fourth album Sill Here and it is a cracker of pure piano led blues. This young man has absorbed the techniques of the masters however this is very much his own body of work. This might sound a tad patronising, and I really don't mean it, however at only twenty- one years old you have to wonder just how much better he can get? Normally an artist matures over a long period of time. However Ben here plays with astonishing skill and, most importantly, feel that were it not for his youngish vocals you would be thinking you were listening to a very much older player. Within these twelve cuts you can sit back and enjoy boogie woogie, stride, jazz, ragtime and of course our beloved blues. Having just listed those variables this is very much a Blues album. Supported by a very fine trio of Oscar Bernal drums, Chris Douglas bass and papa Aron Levin on guitar I could just imagine sitting in a bar Royal Street New Orleans and being absolutely enthralled by this combo. There are so many pure gems here that it seems inappropriate to select a few for particular mention but I really enjoyed That's The Meal, Kissing At Midnight, the title track Still Here and Crown Jewel. Heck there is even a holiday season tune Christmas Rain that suits perfectly the day here in Fife as I write this. I certainly feel disposed to seeking out Ben's back catalogue. Highly recommended for lovers of straight ahead no frills music played with real passion and skill.

GRAEME SCOTT

CHICKEN-BONE SLIM

SERVE IT TO ME HOT

VIZZTONE RECORDS

I like Chickenbone Slim. This is a chap you would invite to play at your Hogmanay party. Because he knows how to have a good time. Mind you, you must develop a sense of fun pretty sharpish if your folks have called you Chickenbone. The last time I encountered Mr. Chickenbone I said, "Some old-fashioned blues courtesy of Chickenbone Slim (aka Larry Teves), a chap who remembers that the blues can sometimes be fun." This, happily for me, means I can simply regurgitate that review as this is very much more of the same. But that would be cheating because he does the blues, he does rockabilly, and he does a wee bit of swing, all

of which works really well with the red-hot band he's got backing him up. That would be bassist Andrew Crane who's been around for a few years now, well respected guitarist Laura Chavez (Candye Kane) and drummer Marty Dodson (Kim Wilson, Charlie Musselwhite). There are also some keyboards from producer Kid Andersen and Aki Kumar pops in to blow his harp on Top Of The Clouds. It has the rough and ready feel of a classic rockabilly record with some fantastic solos from Ms. Chavez. It swings like a pendulum do (one for the old folks there) and when he gets his groove on then it's nigh on irresistible. Check out Wild Eyed Woman for documentary evidence of that statement. Gentlemen (and ladies, hey it's 2021) who won't leave the house without slapping on the pomade will find Squares Everywhere their song of choice. Those vibes continue on Hey Shakalo and let's not forget a special mention to the cowbell on the closing Hook Me Up. This is a delight from start to finish and will guarantee your socially distanced / Zoom party gets everyone dancing.

STUART A HAMILTON

COLIN JAMES

OPEN ROAD

STONY PLAIN RECORDS

This is the 20th album from the Canadian blues guitar artist, Colin James. It features 13 tracks, which were written over the last two years, spent both on the road and in lockdown.
As Colin admitted, it was a tough choice to select just 13 tracks from the material he had put together. The album was recorded in Vancouver and mixed at Abbey Road Studios. Colin's career has spanned 30 years, during which time he has toured extensively and amassed various honours, including being inducted into the Canadian Music Hall Of Fame in 2014. He has worked with many blues greats, amongst which he can list Bonnie Raitt, Albert Collins and Keith Richards. He was also privileged to have once shared the stage with Stevie Ray Vaughan, who encouraged him with his advice and words of wisdom. The album does not disappoint and opens with the Tony Joe White song As The Crow Flies, which combines clear vocals, strong guitar work and a full-bodied backing treatment with organ for added depth. Albert Kings Can't You See What You're Doing To Me is next up and gets some very nice backing from a horn section. The Magic Sam song That's Why I'm Crying is distinctly reminiscent of a Gary Moore slow blues, which is no bad thing. The title track Open Road has a very dusty, southern road feel, with slide steel guitar and a steady beat, which leads into a nicely constructed guitar break. Change it, written by Doyle Bramhall, a school buddy of Stevie Ray, allows Colin to pay homage to his guitar hero. Raging River again features the sweet tones of Colin's vocals accompanied by his acoustic slide. The album is a great mixture of self-penned numbers and solid versions of songs by some blues greats. There's a lovely version of Otis Rush's It Takes Time, with some slick harmonica from Steve Mariner. Bob Dylan's, It Takes A Lot To Laugh gets a rocky update with laid back electric slide and some soulful sax. The album is neatly wrapped up with a slow blues number, Booker T's I Love You More Than Words Can Say, which rounds off very nicely this 20th album from this very versatile and no-nonsense blues artist.

STEVE BANKS

JON SHAIN & FJ VENTRE

NEVER FOUND A WAY TO TAME THE BLUES

Flying Records

The first thing I see as I pick up this album is the quality cover of a snake wrapped around the four strings of a bass guitar, which for some reason makes me know I'm gonna love it (snakes fascinate me). Two guys, Jon on guitar, vocals and FJ, bass, keyboard, and vocals along with five guests, one of whom I know quite well Anne Harris who plays fiddle, as well as Dave Mattacks(drums), Doug Hammer(piano). Bob Beach (Harmonica) and Rissi Palmer(vocals). As the resonator guitar strikes up along with the harmonica, I'm on board this train and going for the whole journey. Lord Have Mercy leads straight into Overnight From Memphis where the guitar and vocals change but the energy of the album doesn't and Bob's harp on this just enhances a truly fantastic song, this literally had me rocking in my chair and gave me goosebumps. Just recently there's been a lot of discussion on shuffling songs of an album but me, I love it as it comes, mostly because if there's a story to be told, like a book, you don't start in the

"this literally had me rocking in my chair and gave me goosebumps"

middle, do you?The title track fits in perfectly as the third song on here snuggling up next to Woodsmoke, a rather calming little number on which I can hear Anne's silky-smooth fiddle playing flowing over my ears like a warm summer breeze. Follow these up with Rissi's vocals on Keep Your Head Above Water and my head is in agreement with my ears, this is the type of album you could play on a winters night, fire burning, bourbon over rocks, looking out the window drifting away to where your memories take you, one minute smooth like on Endless Sea then you hit the rapids of Sinking Ship then, just when you think it can't get any better, FJ starts slapping his upright bass on Outraged, a rather splendid foot tapping addition to an already quality twelve track album.

BARRY BLUES BARN HOPWOOD

DAVE HUNT

BEHIND THE MOON

MAD EARS PRODUCTION

Dave's new release is a set of fourteen original tracks all punctuated with storming harmonica driven rock and blues tones throughout. Another album written during lockdown, this flows very well from the opening bars of first tune Take Me To The Sun with a dirty bass groove provided by Stuart Goodacre and fine slide playing from Dave, who also adds harmonica and vocals throughout the release. Andy Littlewood provides keyboards to the raunchy Kiss This which is all about the groove and rhythm, a love story with a twist. Pete Nelson joins in on drums to the catchy Doctor, melodic tones here. Preacher Man is a highlight, mellow slide playing belies the strong vocal delivery then harmonica peppers the tune, then some acapella vocals take this tune to another level. Dave said, "all his songs come from jamming on a loop pedal then reworked later". This adds to the whole live feel of the release. The title track Behind The Moon opens with great keyboards, a rocky take, anthemic chorus included on this Gospel infused tune. Funky Stew changes the style and tempo highlighting a swampy beat and snarling vocals. Dave's storytelling on Freeman, captures the essence of a great tune, just exhilarating. Prices Down has a steady groove, again, great storytelling with a catchy chorus. Blonde Woman is another rocky blues tune sung with sassy tongue in cheek. Last track, Don't Leave This Way is dark and evocative. Highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

DIONNE BENNETT

SUGAR HIP YA YA

HUNNIA

A new name to me but a lady with a terrific presence and vocal power. She has a long career as both a backing singer, even including Dr John & Super Furry Animals, a member of Rhys Ifans band the Peth, opening for Oasis, a performer for CBeebies and has worked in the industry for years. Listening to the opening number, a great version of the Etta James classic Tell Mama, and then the title track, I immediately thought that she is New Orleans born & bred, but no, she is a Brit but no less a brilliant singer for that. In fact, the album covers several styles from straight R&B to Blues, soul and funk and I found myself listening to it straight through three or four times, just enjoying the heck out of a brilliant singer with a great band behind her belting out some of the most danceable sounds I've heard in ages. Attila Herr lays down some awesome bass lines and he is joined by Lajos Gyenge on drums, Matyas Premecz on keys and Laszlo Borsodi on guitar and they really do a fine job of backing up Ms. Bennett but it is her vocals that grab the ear and whether it is the funk of Allen Toussaint's Yes We Can Can or the jazz-tinged and dramatic, almost Tango, Don't Fall For love or Sugar Hip Ya Ya itself it is her hot and sharp vocals that leap out at you. For me, the standout track here is My Life, a soft song, looking back wistfully and really showing off just how sensitive a vocalist she can be. A terrific 'new' artiste and one I'm looking forward to seeing more of in the coming years.

ANDY SNIPPER

ELIAS BERNET BAND

BETTER OFF WITH THE BLUES

INDEPENDENT

Seriously impressive keyboard chops from bandleader Elias Bernet, who covers a wide range of 12-bar moods and related genres on this all original 15-track set. My educated guess would be that this guy listens to a lot of Allen Toussaint, as witnessed by such obviously New Orleans-flavoured tunes as Johnny The Roller and Easy Target For The Blues. Play something sweet, play something mellow indeed. But there's more to Bernet than that. Take the funk-tinged Monkey Juice, built on a riff that lodges its way into your brain even on first play. Slow blues Heavy Load is deftly handled, and rock and influenced numbers such as A Little R'n'R allow the bandleader to get his Jerry Lee Lewis on. Bernet boogie-woogies like Meade Lux Lewis on Light That Fire, while the title track could be an outtake from one of those Jimmy Smith Hammond organ jazz albums Blue Note put out in the 1960s. It's fair to observe that all the genres covered are somewhat traditional, but the effervescence of the musicianship makes up for any familiarity in the terrain. It's all piano and B3-led, with able assistance from Markus Fritzsche on double bass and Bernhard Egger on drums, and no pesky guitarists getting in the way. This is the third album from the band, who incidentally hail from the Swiss town of St Gallen. If you are tempted to seek out a copy, the website is www.eliasbernet.ch

DAVID OSLER

FRAN PEGG

GIN HOUSE BLUES

INDEPENDENT

Christmas came early, when I received this excellent album of 10 great blues track by the Bedford-based blues artist, Fran Pegg. I find it odd that emerging artists will sometimes do excellent covers of old blues standards, only to lose their way later with their own material. After listening to this collection, I can only hope that Fran remains true to the blues and continues to create more in a similar vein; I mean, they're all tried and tested classics for a reason. This is not to say that Fran doesn't put her own stamp on the songs she's covered. Proof of this is the stunning opening track, Eric Bibb's With My Maker. It has slightly distorted vocals, a heavy drum beat and wailing harmonica, with an atmosphere reminiscent of Led Zeppelin's When The Levee Breaks. How Blue Can You Get, which BB King regularly covered, is next and features crystal clear guitarwork to accompany Fran's soulful vocals. The title track, Gin House Blues, one of Bessie Smith's, is a delightful version of this 20s (1920s!) song. I'd Rather Go Blind is a more upbeat version than one normally hears, but Fran lets the words speak for themselves on this one and it works well. Freddie King's/Don Nix's Same Old Blues is a slow ballad, with some understated piano work and angelic backing vocals. Little Walter's Just Your Fool gets a lively treatment and shows a more light-hearted side to the blues, whilst showcasing Fran's versatility. My favourite track on the album is Willie Dixon's Wang Dang Doodle, a true blues classic, and the band really sound like they enjoyed recording

their energetic take on it. Early In The Morning by Louis Jordan gets some overdue recognition next, and has a low-down New Orleans feel to it. Keeping it in Louisiana, the next classic is the song Fortune Teller, by Allen Toussaint, covered by the Stones back in 1964. This fine collection is rounded off with a powerful version of Howlin' Wolf's How Many More Years, on which Fran and the band give their all. This selection of blues tunes is well worth a listen and Fran Pegg is certainly a name to look out for.

STEVE BANKS

FRANK RICHARD

ROUGH ENOUGH

INDEPENDENT

This is a man with an amazing back story which would at first sight seem to point more toward a documentary or, maybe, a book. Richard moved close to Woodstock to check out the vibe of Dylan etc, received his first guitar lesson from 60's legend Tim Hardin and was also arrested at an anti-Vietnam war demonstration. Having spent around 50 chequered years on the road playing in various bands and performing solo in bars and clubs etc he once opened for Richie Havens and received a rave review from no less than the Washington Post. Incredibly this is his recording debut and is made up of a few original songs, a few borrowed from friends and a few covers. All These Blues is a trad song with Richard singing, playing acoustic guitar and harmonica and it sounds altogether wonderful. The approach is essentially acoustic throughout the album with additional sympatico backing from dobro, mandolin, bass, keyboards and backing vocals. His evocative voice is weary, travel worn and infused with road dust, and he uses it really well to tell his rootsy tales of life as a wandering minstrel. Peter Coyote's descriptive road song Dead End aptly captures the mood of Richard's lonely travels. 1-900 Mary is a haunting, atmospheric tale of urban depression, drug culture and missing home and loved ones. John Prine's witty Some Humans Ain't Human is a gentle sardonic offering, and the self-penned River Girl Blue is a sad tale of lost love with Richard's crumpled vocal adding to the tension. A brave and intriguing cover of Bob Dylan's Knocking On Heaven's Door gets updated with lyrics about gun culture and the horrors of climate change. I thoroughly enjoyed this album and look forward to hearing more and to the book and film.

DAVE DRURY

FRANKIE LYMON AND THE TEENAGERS

THE SINGLES AND ALBUMS COLLECTION 1956-61

ACROBAT MUSIC

This double CD pulls together a selection of both individual and "teenagers" recordings made between 1956-61, including all the U.S.A and U.K. Pop and R&B chart hits and selections from two albums; namely, At The London Palladium and rock' n' roll. Frankie Lymon was a phenomenal singer who was just fourteen when he had a number one hit in both the USA and UK with Why Do Fools Fall In Love, a song he co-wrote. On this collection of sixty-two tracks this song is the standout song and one I never tire of hearing. All the material sits comfortably in the R&B category although there are some strong Doo-Wop influences, where Joe Negroni's baritone vocal contrasts well. This music was the forerunner for the later rock'n'roll explosion led by Elvis Presley. As often happened at this time once an artist had a hit record the follow ups tended to be very similar sounding releases and this can be clearly heard with the follow up single, I Want You To Be My Girl, although the regular use of Jimmy Wright's Orchestra did beef up some of the later songs. When the hits dried up Frankie recorded several well-known covers which included Jailhouse Rock, Silhouettes and Waitin' In School, all good records but they didn't touch the original versions. Frankie had a very short carer as he passed away at the age of just twenty-five in 1968 but he has left a legacy of some exceptional songs and performances that have been showcased well in this release, which comes with a detailed twenty-page booklet. A stimulating collection that highlights where the foundation for rock 'n' roll came from.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

GEORGE ENSLE

BE A BETTER ME

PUFF BUNNY RECORDS

Over 11 tracks of acoustic roots music, the singer-songwriter George Ensle paints many attractive sonic portraits, of modern life, love and the travails that ensue. With a sound palette of acoustic, 12 string, and resonator guitars, piano, banjo, upright bass, cello, violins and a massed gospel choir, the songs occupy the same musical ground as early Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, and although there is nothing here to raise the tempo, no grand-standing, screeching solos, and no songs that go over the 5 minutes it is a very pleasant listen. Be A Better Man, and $1.65 which start the album could have been hectoring, lecturing songs, but here they are delivered as an acceptance of life, and its unfairness. All the musicians that play on the album are clearly talented,

JON SHAIN & FJ VENTRE
NEVER FOUND A WAY TO TAME THE BLUES
NEW ALBUM OUT NOW

JONSHAIN.COM/MUSIC

ELLES BAILEY

SHINING IN THE HALFLIGHT

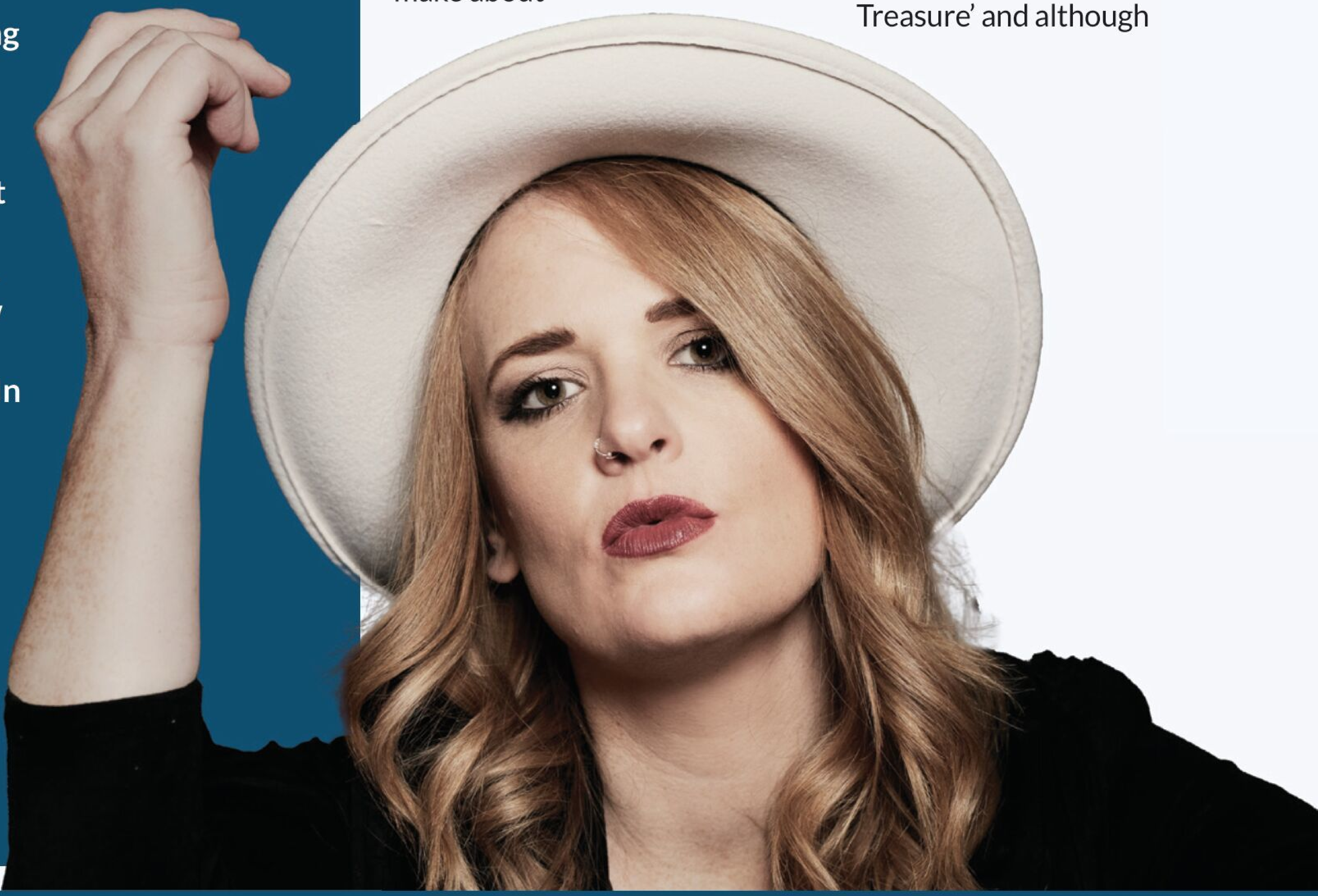
Outlaw Music

This is the third studio album for Elles Bailey and is just a stunning eclectic mix of styles and genres rooted in the blues. Ten songs full of positive uplifting emotions in the face of adversity especially relating to the pandemic. She co-wrote a few of the songs and this just adds to the inspirational feel. Cheats And Liars opens the release, a song about lack of subsidizing the Arts community and the struggle fellow artists have had recently, some hard hitting lyrics here. The Game has a catchy infectious chorus but it's the backing harmonies that lift this tune. Stones is purely a blues-soaked tune, Elles vocals are gritty, smoky and thought provoking a real highlight. Colours Start To Run tones the tempo, with a cautionary message. Then there is a magical moment, a love song, Different Kind Of Love, written with Martin Harley, Elles pushes her vocal range on this one and delivers sweet tones. Who's That; has soaring harmonies with great keyboard accompaniment by Jonny Henderson. Sunshine City is joyous,

"a stunning eclectic mix of styles and genres rooted in the blues"

full of pace and energy, a letting go of emotions written with Matt Owens, the band just takes the song to rapturous level. Halfway House has great guitar work from Joe Wilkins, again fantastic backing vocals. Riding Out The Storm is a slow number, a song for uncertain times. The final track, Shining In The Halflight is an astounding song full depth and shade and sonic harmonies. A release to savour every note.

COLIN CAMPBELL



creative, ensemble players helping to tell tales. The one cover on the album, the traditional Down By The River Side finishes the album, but there is no filler on the album, with all of the songs, all the instruments earning their space. This is not an album to put on to get a party started, but that doesn't seem to be the point of it. It is a thoughtful album, with exquisite singing, writing and playing, perfect for the quieter moments.

BEN MACNAIR

HADDA BROOKS

OUT OF THE BLUE

ACROBAT MUSIC

Hadda Brooks was a classically-trained pianist who became a leading figure in the world of boogie-woogie music as well as an accomplished vocalist. The 2-CD collection boasts fifty tracks spanning the years 1945-1953 and opens with Just A Little Bluesy complete with a rich horn sound and upbeat piano. The important point to make about this set is the fact that the recordings are remarkably clear and easy on the ear which is not always the case when releasing past material. That's My Desire showcases Brooks' lead vocal which complimented by the rhythmic electric guitar and is one of three Top Ten hits of hers alongside Out Of The Blue and What Have I Done. She starred in the 1974 comedy Out Of The Blue alongside George Brent in which she performed the title song in a nightclub. Whilst the discography does not have precise dates, the album has been meticulously thought out with the album sleeve notes penned by Paul Watts a fascinating insight into the woman. That's Where I Came In is one of many compositions in a trio format and it is moments like this where Brooks excels both musically and vocally. Interestingly, her recording of Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere featured in the 1995 Sean Penn directed film The Crossing Guard and led to her performing in venues such as Johnny Depp's Viper Room celebrating her 80th birthday there in 1996. Bonnie Raitt called her an 'American Treasure' and although

she passed away in 2002 aged 86 she continued to perform right up until a few months before. In conclusion, this is a musical journey that showcases this post-war star who was willing to be different and not be pigeon-holed. A significant figure in the world of music who appears to have been overlooked by some.

GLENN SARGEANT

JON SPEAR BAND

B-SIDE OF MY LIFE

INDEPENDENT

The pandemic hit this central Virginia band hard, I don't know this for sure, but as their strapline is "live music is better", it is a fair assumption. It obviously means that they have put a lot into this album, their third, to compensate for the lack of gigs. There are a couple of new age-y numbers in The Shaman and the reflection on current events that is Follow The Light, but the majority of the album is much closer to the blues and related music, right from the opening funk-blues of Big Talk. The title track is a quick history of some of the vagaries of record business history set to a cracking rock and roll beat and with some fine blues harmonica from lead vocalist Dara James and pumping piano from guest Skip Haga. The huge-sounding Kick In The Head is a fine slab of grinding blues-rock, whilst Snakes And Spiders is another strong blues-rocker, with some particularly noteworthy guitar work. Can't Have Nothing is a good example of how the band puts across an important message in a bluesy format; in contrast, My Old T-Shirts is an affectionate song I can certainly relate to, set to a New Orleans-ish arrangement There are two cover versions on the album: Darker Side, written by keyboards player Bruce McCabe and borrowed from Jonny Lang's second album, is a moody soul-blues tinged ballad, a top-notch performance, with some superlative and beautifully subtle guitar work, and The Neville Brothers' Yellow Moon fits the band perfectly and is given a fine, mellow and slightly spooky treatment. This admirable set closes with the straight jumping blues of Time For The Blues, which fits in a whole bunch of blues names in less than three and a half minutes. Good stuff!

NORMAN DARWEN

JONNY SLIDEWELL

12 SELF-PENNED SONG

INDEPENDENT

Living up to his surname, Jonny Slidewell does just that as the boogie/R&B riff of Someone New beats out with bottleneck slipping and sliding all over it like a greasy wheeled muscle car hitting an oil slick. Showcasing a range of stylings, astute country blues picking particularly stands out on Honey We're Thro' combining infectious strumming and humming that would go down well in a live situation. Recorded on a Tascam four-track porta studio, in anticipation of a record deal, the lo-fi sonics work to good effect on these no-frills songs as evidenced on the jaunty Girl Next Door which playfully thrusts solidly ahead. Unflashy steady grooving is where it's at on these 12 self-penned songs that let the music do all the talking in a blues language aficionados know well. The

BERNIE MARSDEN

CHESS

Conquest Records

Chess is the second installment of the Inspiration collection from Bernie Marsden. It is a tip of the hat to one of the blue's most important monuments, Chess Records in Chicago. As he was growing up and learning to play guitar, Bernie was listening to everything that came out of Chess Studios. This is album is a thank you to all those people who started him on his blues journey. Just Your Fool (Walter Jacobs) kicks off the album in great style. The harmonica of Alan Glenn compliments the song so well. Bernie lays down a great guitar throughout, perfectly accompanied by his band. Back In The USA (Chuck Bery) highlights Bernies influences to a T. Superb rock n roll boogie shake what your mama gave ya tune. Two tracks in, I',m loving this album. No nod to Chess Records would be complete without tipping the hat to Willie Dixon. I'm Ready and You Can't Judge A Book both get equal Bernie treatment. Dixon was a scout, producer, writer, and all-around musician at Chess and these two tunes leave you in

> ***"a marvellous album and tribute to Chess Records"***

no doubt as to why. The band, Alan Glenn (Harmonica) John Gordon (Bass) Bob Haddrell (Keys), and Jim Russell (Drums) compliment Bernie at every turn. They are so tight, I'd love to see this line-up perform this album in its entirety on a live footing. Won't Be Hanging Around (Albert King) is nothing short of a masterpiece. Bernie Marsden as we all know is a great guitarist but he takes that skill to another level here. Vocally, I don't think I've heard Bernie in a better vocal performance. That's Alright (James A Lane) is a fairly new tune for me, It's like, how did I miss this? Wonderful tune once again delivered with such grace and favour. Who's Been Talking (Chester Burnett), is the kind of blues song that makes you glad to be living. Two short instrumentals written by Bernie finish what is a marvellous album and tribute to Chess Records.

STEPHEN HARRISON

JIMMY CARTER

BLIND FAITH

Independent

Back in the early 90s, I witnessed The Blind Boys Of Alabama at the Redcar Blues Festival. The long-standing gospel group won over the crowd with no effort whatsoever. They then went on to work with all manner of artists, though they kept the faith throughout. Now, along comes Jimmy Carter, he was there that day, the co-founder of the group back in the 30s and stalwart member, and now the only surviving member for the original line-up. This is his first solo album, and whilst all the songs fit into the realm of gospel, at least lyrically, musically it might not be quite what you expect. Jimmy and producer Ron Pullman agreed the direction and it is different. Take the opener, with Ryan Joseph's prominent violin weaving though the jazzy arrangement and Jimmy's lived-in vocals, or the bluesy, but very gospel-ish title track. Dream On has an almost New Orleans rhythm and blues backing, and I Am With You Still is a gospel ballad in memory of The Blind

"Recommended, of course"

Boys' co-founder, Clarence Fountain, it is a moving tribute. There is a long list of collaborators on this album, and guests include Charlie Musselwhite, who is cited on the back describing Jimmy as "as deep as it gets", and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. There are a couple of tracks that perhaps qualify as sacred blues (musically): Find Your Way Home is a very different and Christian take on the Crossroads myth, and the closer reminds me a little of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (yes, Charlie is on harp here). Recommended, of course.

NORMAN DARWEN

Devil Makes reinforces this with sweeps of harmonica over a basic guitar groove underpinning an untreated vocal. So In Love plunders a down at heart blues lyrical trope and minor chord lament which would benefit from a full studio recording experience, although this lo-fi rendition does have its charms. The boogie shuffle of I'm Losing with neat guitar by Jack Poole and drums by Leigh Eaton proves that these cheap thrills are deserving of proper studio time. It's clear that having written all these songs Slidewell pours his heart and soul into his delivery especially as he lays down cool bottleneck all over the chugging composition Bad Woman. With few songs breaking the three-minute limit, they achieve instant impact without outstaying their time and that's the crafty charm of this homemade homily to R&B that, by necessity, takes the genre back to basics and lays bare these accessible tunes without the need of bells and whistles.

PAUL DAVIES

KATE GREEN

A DARK CARNIVAL

INDEPENDENT

Not sure if this will appeal to all of Blues Matters readership, based as it is largely in folk music rather than blues, but I did find her voice quite captivating, and the overall performances are superb. Kate Green has been around for a while but not too often ranging from South Yorkshire, her adopted home as she was born on Clyde side of Scottish & Irish parents. The thing that struck me about her voice is that she has an almost chameleon-like ability to pick up on the nuances of any song she is singing and make the song fit her singing style, perfectly! Take her version of When The Levee Breaks: the band are plying it as a dark and heavy blues (as you would expect) but she sings it as a folk song and somehow it makes perfect sense. That then leads into Renegades (Of Lave And Rage) played to a samba beat but with her perfectly pitched vocals singing in praise of Extinction Rebellion and the collapse of financiers the world over! Her band are equally excellent comprising of long-term associates Patrick Walker (guitar, mandolin, violin & viola) and Raymond Greenoaken (guitar & octave Mandola) along with Jed Grimes (guitars & Weissenborn steel guitar), Liam Fender (Hammond, piano, clavinet), Neil Harland (bass), Paul Smith (drums & percussion), Mick Doonan (Irish pipes) & Rob File (keyboards & electronics). The songs range widely in style from pure folk like the opener Lady Diamond or the chilling and haunting Bows Of London (also known as The Cruel Sister and The Two Sisters), to Mi Amigo which has a slightly Country feel to the song (about a US Air Force Flying Fortress which crashed in Sheffield in 1944 killing all its crew but managing to avoid schoolchildren playing nearby) but a very British sound to her vocals. It isn't a blues album, but it is worth investigating. Personally, I enjoyed it as much on the tenth listen as the first.

ANDY SNIPPER

KEVIN BRENNAN

THE CLOWN & THE CIGARETTE GIRL

REVOLVER MUSIC LTD

This album starts off with an easy story and very much a made by hand (crafted) feel, simple, but

beautifully put together. Equally beautifully packaged the CD pops out of the cover like the cutest tiny vinyl album. 13 Tracks quite folky in feel with a strong beat throughout and full Smokey aura to the wonderful array of instruments from piano, harmonica, mandolin, concertina, washboard, guitar, and banjo. This 13-track album took me back to the pubs of Clonakilty in gorgeous Ireland where artists from all over the world meet to just play together, swap stories and make beautiful music in the most traditional of surroundings with the simplest of stories to tell, and acoustically sang along to their instrument of love. The second track is a real favourite, Tabernacle Lane, somehow sophisticated and folksy at the same time, the use of percussion gives such a depth to this album and with a great pull-out full of a few photo's, which is cool as you to get to put a face to all the talent but also the words to each track, sing along to every track should you so wish...If, a little more folksy and sophisticated than some blues albums there is no mistaking that the stories and the mood are purely influenced by pure the blues.

JEAN KNAPPITT

MIKE FALL &THE FALLOUTS

GOIN' HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

INDEPENDENT

Stephen Harrison gave this band's 2018 release Born In A Different Place a warm reception in these pages and in 2021 Dave Drury enjoyed an EP entitled Big City. Mikael (Mike) Fall is a Swedish harmonica player and vocalist, and the band consists of Torbjorn Fall on guitar, Surjo Benign on upright bass and Kiell Gustavson on drums and sleigh bells; everyone contributes backing vocals. As you can tell from the title and the presence of sleigh bells, this is a Christmas offering, a short EP of four originals. The title track starts slowly but soon cranks up with a rocking guitar riff and those sleigh bells to provide a very catchy song that Mike closes with a quote from Jingle Bells. Mike sings well and without accent and plays some striking harp too, a good start. I'll Be Your Santa Claus is classic rock and roll that steams along with slide double tracked over the rhythm guitar work while Bad Boy recounts a chance encounter in the woods; will this make Mike ineligible for Santa's list, he wonders, especially when he reveals that the lady in question is Mrs Claus! Run Krampus Run is an instrumental feature for Mike's harp over a thunderous jungle beat from the rhythm section. If you must have Christmas music, this is far more fun than Slade and Mariah Carey!

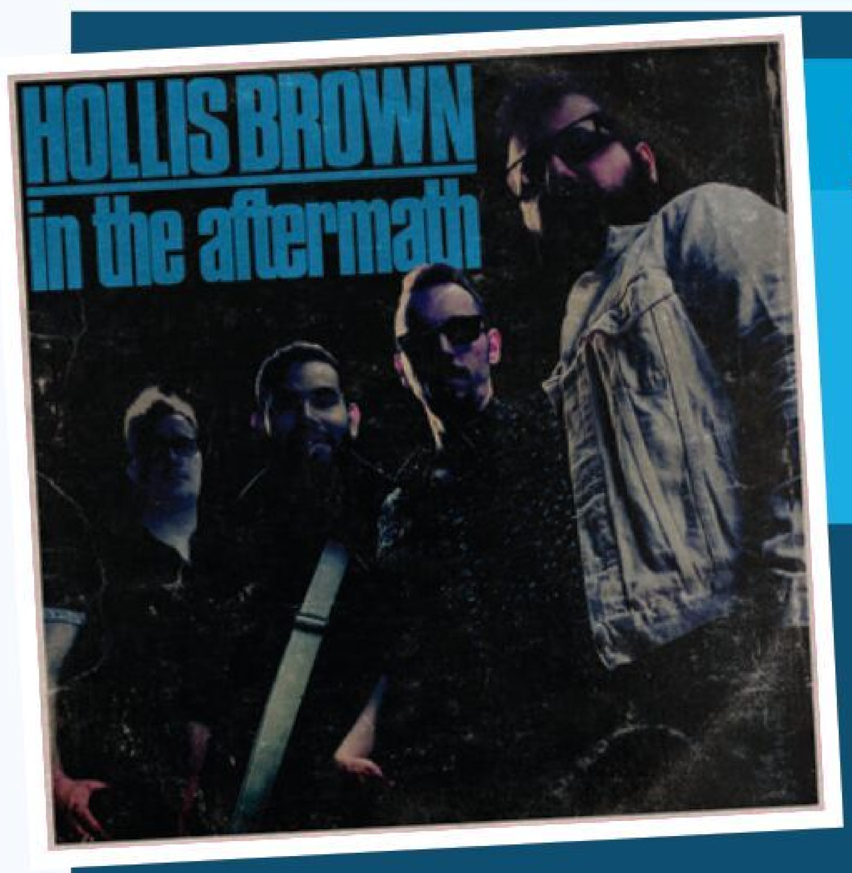
JOHN MITCHELL

MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD

DO RIGHT, SAY RIGHT

APM RECORDS

Hell, yeah! If I didn't know better, I'd have put this down as a long-lost soul blues hybrid straight out of Memphis via Muscle Shoals. It's not, of course, as despite his moniker, Mississippi MacDonald is neither American nor Scottish, but a London boy. He's certainly a hard worker with half a dozen to his (and other) names since 2014 and he's rapidly developed into a topflight writer and performer. This



HOLLIS BROWN

IN THE AFTERMATH

Mascot/Provogue

Armed with a few glasses of whiskey and a determination to do something special, Hollis Brown decamped into the recording studio to lay down their version of The Rolling Stone's first all-original album that they recorded in 1966. Nothing unusual there you may think, but this was a 24-hour blitz on what was a groundbreaking album back in the day. It is not just a parody or a rip-off, this is a band that pours so much energy into producing a memorable piece of music.

Paint It Black kicks off the album in fine style, forget the Stones for a while, this is not a carbon copy, it's a genuine adoration of an album with their hearts and souls on show. The riffs are there, albeit done with their own style, the drums are spot on, vocally, it's brilliant, and the harmonica is played with gusto. So, there is a lot to enjoy and like about this version by Hollis Brown. Doncha Bother Me, has long been a favouite tune of mine, and this very credible take is masterful. So bluesy, full of soul, and delivered so well. I'm sure Mick and Keith would love to hear this. Who knows, it might entice them to perform it live in the future. That's how good Hollis Brown has made

"Armed with a few glasses of whiskey and a determination to do something special"

this album. High And Dry, is a mixture of country, folk, and blues, a perfect combination in my mind. Throw in some foot-stomping boogie piano and what you have is nothing short of masterful. Goin' Home brings to an end what has been a brilliant album. Hollis Brown have every right to feel proud of themselves. It's not an easy task to do such a seminal album by one of the world's biggest ever bands. It takes some balls, Hollis Brown have great big brass ones for doing this. I can't wait to hear some of their own work and hopefully get to see them perform live one day. Hopefully, they will throw in a few tunes from this album.

STEPHEN HARRISON

MICKEY & SYLVIA

THE SINGLES & ALBUMS COLLECTION 1952-62

Acrobat

Mickey Baker was a guitarist and Sylvia Vanterpool was a singer and they teamed up to make pop/R&B records as Mickey & Sylvia in the 50's. This 2CD collection kicks off with 5 tracks by Little Sylvia solo with the pick of the bunch being Drive Daddy Drive a jumping and catchy little number with a call and response chorus. We then move on to the Mickey & Sylvia tracks and all of their eight career hits in the USA pop and R&B charts are included here with the Fats Domino inspired I'm Going Home, Baby You're So Fine and There Oughta Be A Law standing out.

Also included are three tracks by Mickey and Kitty which feature a rocking version of St Louis Blues. Mickey "Guitar" Baker was an in-demand session man and recorded his own solo album for Atlantic entitled The Wildest Guitar and many tracks are included here with my particular favourite being a

"Love Is Strange charted all over the world"

great rocked up cover of the Third Man Theme. But of course, there can only be one star of this particular album and that is the huge hit Love Is Strange which was covered by many artists including Buddy Holly, Everly Brothers, Wings and Everything But The Girl.

Over the years it has been used in many movies and TV programmes and still endures to this day. With its jangling guitar intro, tinkling piano, catchy cowbell and Mickey & Sylvia's wondrous harmony vocals Love Is Strange charted all over the world.

Although I know this song well, I had never previously realised that the pair had opened for Bo Diddley and picked up this blockbuster song from him and then recorded it with his blessing. Fascinating. Great stuff!

DAVE DRURY

release sees the blues and soul with a gospel tinge, especially when the organ is driving things along. The band he's put together for this really do a sterling job so a round of applause to Phil Dearing (The Gillies) on keyboards and guitar, Elliot Boughen (Soul Fixers) on bass and Mark Johnson-Brown on drums with Lucy Dearing adding in some well-judged backing vocals. There are horns as well, but they're not credited on the promo release and if they're sampled, then it's a mighty fine job. It's a very up-tempo release with the likes of I Was Wrong and That's It I Quit racing along in fine fettle. When he slows things down you can hear that there is some still work to be done on his vocals but it's the tiniest of niggles and only someone as petty as me would point it out. What is not in doubt is the quality of his songwriting and guitar playing. The eight originals are uniformly excellent, and he does a grand job on the sole cover, Denise LaSalles Your Wife Is Cheating On Us. Although it's the Little Milton cover that springs to mind when you hear Mississippi Macdonald's take on it. The guitar playing is fabulous. Very Albert King circa his Stax days and in my world, it doesn't get much better than that.

STUART A HAMILTON

NINA SIMONE

NINA'S BLUES

FREMAUX &ASSOCIES

Eunice Kathleen Waymon, better known as Nina Simone has been one of the most written about artists of the last century. There are a few reasons for that, her active role within the civil rights movement, which was attacked mercilessly from some quarters, her deep sadness within her personal life, but most importantly as one of the finest blues artists to ever walk the earth. This 4 CD boxset contains 77 songs of sheer brilliance. CD 1 is entitled Little Girl Blue and contains songs such as, Don't Smoke In Bed, which is darkly gripping, whilst being a fantastic tune. Her voice draws you into her world completely. Then there is possibly the most well-known Nina song, My Baby Just Cares For Me. Her repertoire of songs is huge, but this remains one of the highlights even now. CD 2, Nina At Town Hall puts her in a live setting, for me, the best way to appreciate her. The Other Woman, written by Simone is simply wonderful, showcasing just how talented a songwriter she was, as well as delivering such a powerful vocal. Fine And Mellow, by Billie Holiday, proves how entwined these two ladies became, both professionally and musically. A magnificent rendition of a Billie Holiday song. CD 3 finds Nina performing at The Newport Festival of 1960. Nina's Blues is a wonderfully crafted instrumental that has the hallmarks of a big band production, yet the blues connotation remains throughout. A truly gifted musician and writer that captivates the audience at Newport. Gin House Blues is one of my favourite Nina Simone tunes. If anyone doubts her credentials as a blues artist, may I suggest that they listen to this? Forbidden Fruit, has an almost devil-may-care attitude to it. We shouldn't be doing this but we'll do it anyway. CD 4 is Nina at The Village Gate. Her rendition of Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out is an outstanding performance. I'm sure Bessie Smith would approve. For any Nina Simone fan or any blues fan, this is a must-get boxset.

STEPHEN HARRISON

STACY MICHART

PRINTERS ALLEY

INDEPENDENT

Stacy Michart has been around for a while, but this is the most confident and powerful album I've heard from him yet. His vocals are strong, the production is up-front and measured and the performances (from his current band I assume) are excellent. Starting off in Cincinnati playing straight blues and then transitioning to Nashville where he has honed his soulful and groove laden sound over the last 23 years. Basically, this is a belting album, full of some fine music and finishing with a delightful version of Basin Street Blues. His band is one of the top live draws in Nashville, especially amongst the tourists and their sets are full of fire and excitement but here, on disc and shorn of the visuals of a full live band, he just lays down fifteen excellent blues tracks, and the more stripped and cleaner format suits the songs very well. Songs like Homewrecker which has a Hall & Oates style groove or Brand New Same Old Blues with its whispering church organ and Michart testifying over picked guitar and muted horns. That leads into Doghouse Blues, classic harp and slide leading into a stomping great Cajun style blues. The album doesn't contain any filler or weak numbers, just fifteen very listenable pieces of music in all the genres of the blues and not a wasted moment. For all that he has released nearly a dozen albums, this one feels the most natural and complete. Thoroughly recommended.

ANDY SNIPPER

THE GREYHOUND GEORGE BAND

GET UP AND WALK!

TIMEZONE RECORDS

Get Up And Walk Is one of those albums which packs a lot of punch into its songs, with pieces lasting more than 7 minutes, with a bellowing brass section, slide guitar, Hammond organ, and the sinewy, lively guitar and world-weary vocals of Greyhound George being the key ingredients. Things start with the lively Thin Line, a funky, lively blues, with outstanding ensemble playing, and light, snappy guitar parts that bring to mind, Robert Cray. The harmony singing is on point throughout the entire song, which doesn't outstay its welcome. Bad Luck is a BB King like swing jive piece, with lively brass, and Alienation Blues lives up to its name, a sad song with minor chords and guitar licks by the truckload. Back in the Groove is an upbeat number, redolent of the sax and Motown sound, with some tasteful jazz playing under the backbeat. The one instrumental Hot Line to Heaven is a lively, Hammond Organ infused piece, with passages of guitar that recall the three kings of the blues, BB, Albert and Freddie. The album's final song, Good Year For The Blues starts off with the lonesome wail of Bad Temper Joe's slide guitar, it is a tasteful slow blues groove, with a strangely optimistic sound. It is a good note on which to end this album, which blends a tuneful, melodic approach to song writing, and puts the sound of the band, rather than

NATALIA M. KING

WOMAN MIND OF MY OWN

Dixie Frog Records

Good advice born of a very long time listening to albums is, never assume that the first track is always going to set the style and tone for the rest of the record. If you did that, hearing the title track of this album would lead you to think that it is completely authentic blues in both approach and realisation, missing only the crackle and pop to being to something laid down in a steamy air-conditioning-free Southern bible belt studio, with a proper blues singer to ice the cake. But then you'd either buy the album and be disappointed by what follows, or ignore it, and miss out on a wonderful collection of various blues styles, linked only by the proper blues singer who puts the vocals on everything. Each track is vastly different from the others, and each one is an individual story about life and love. Standout is Pink Houses, which slides out of the speakers into your ears like vintage whiskey and unrolls a cautionary tale about the American

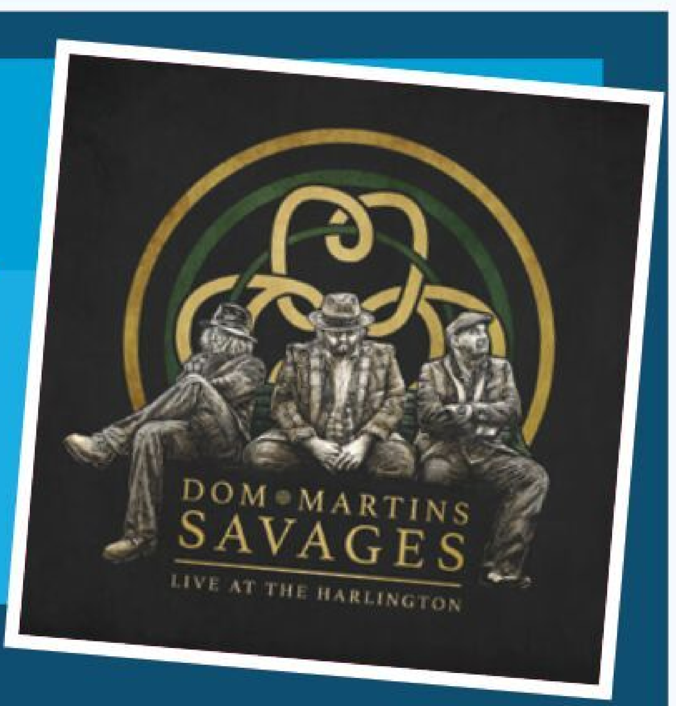
"it makes me look forward to whatever she does next"

Dream. So Far Away has only an acoustic guitar to guide it, leaving all the space and atmosphere to Ms King's wonderfully expressive voice. Balance always helps an album, and the balance here is following that song with a Rufus Thomas sounding opening to (Lover) You Don't Treat Me No Good. The gentleman seems to think he is the injured party, Ms King has other ideas, and they harmonise with joyful gospel backing vocals and a deliciously cool electric piano break. Sunrise To Sunset takes a Billie Holliday style with cool jazz guitar and double bass, but the all of Ms King's varying vocal styles are never pale copies of proven originals, they all bear the unmistakable identity of her own voice, and that's always the mark of a class artist. This collection wants me to check back into Natalia M. King's catalogue, but more importantly, it makes me look forward to whatever she does next.

ANDY HUGHES

DOM MARTINS' SAVAGES

LIVE AT THE HARLINGTON



Independent

As well as having a talented solo career going on, Dom Martin also has a stunning trio. Dom is band leader, guitarist, and lead singer with Dave Thompson on bass guitar and Laurence McKeown on drums. Thirteen tracks of pure genius guitar work with a rhythm section that are nearing perfection, the band's chemistry is the key, this is no ordinary blues rock trio. Opening with Dixie Black Hand, Dom is given carte blanche to home in his guitar soloing, the sonics of which are amazing, just keeps the tune fresh and exciting. There are a few Rory Gallagher reinterpretations Hands Off and Laundromat are played loud and furiously with exquisite guitar technique, similarly Morning Sun and What's Going On. They cover early Taste tunes, the highlight being Railway And Gun, vocal delivery is sharp and the interplay of the band mesmerizing. His solo songs are given full band flavour, Hell For You is outstanding. But it is his ability to build up the instrumental, State Of Your Mind that really inspires, the guitar riff is melodic with psychedelic tones. Antrim

"Thirteen tracks of pure genius guitar work with a rhythm section that are nearing perfection"

Blues, The Man From Nowhere and Mercy sees Dom in accustomed acoustic musical environment, mixing ragtime, slide guitar and astounding finger picking.
The set finishes with Dealer, vocals raw and emotional and his acoustic playing is hypnotic. Best live album of the year, only this reviewer's opinion, hear for yourselves, Dom is an astounding young talent and an articulate musician.

COLIN CAMPBELL

the sounds of individual musicians at its centre.

BEN MACNAIR

THE TWANGTOWN PARAMOURS

DOUBLE DOWN ON A BAD THING

INSIDE EDGE RECORDS

Just when you think all the fabulous band names must be taken by now, along The Twangtown Paramours to show that there are still wonderful monikers to be found and used. They say you can't judge a book by its cover, and that rule applies to albums, but taking hints from what you see before you hear anything is fine, as long as you are willing to have your perceptions upended. But impressions are on the nail here, Mike T Lewis and Marybeth Zamer are clearly not teenagers looking to change the world. What you want them to be is people who can write, play and sing perfect vignettes of Americana, blues, and indefinable buts of other wonderful things that are out there. And that's exactly what they provide. Everything is put down in its place, allowing Marybeth Zamer's endless range of vocal inflections and emotions to shine through. Anyone But You is a song that demands experience of life and love to deliver it convincingly, and the vocal, and the aching guitar solo that accompanies it, are exactly what is required to bring the

IMAGE: JIM HEAL

song home. Mike steps up to the mic for Whoa Nellie, a cheerful twelve-bar that belies the heartbreak of a man done wrong just once too often. The stripped-back piano for Love Is A Stranger belongs in a smoky late-night club, where the only people left are nursing neat whiskeys and pondering where it all went wrong, while the perfect soundtrack embraces them from the stage. Fabulous song titles are far more common of course, but I Miss Who I Thought You Were certainly stands up as a contender for one of the best, and it's another heart-breaker. If there is justice, The Twangtown Paramours will find that this, their first full band offering, takes them into the upper eche-lons of blues and Americana bands reaching ever larger audiences, because this collection of songs is simply too good not to be heard by as many fans of grown-up music and composition as it can reach. A wonderful album.

ANDY HUGHES

THORBJ ØRN RISAGER & THE BLACK TORNADO

BEST OF

RUF RECORDS

Denmark's Thorbjørn Ris-ager & The Black Tornado have been crafting their big band brand of blues, rock, R&B, soul, funk and swing since 2002. Guitarist, singer-songwriter and band leader Thorbjørn has been leading the way building a great following and a superb reputation as a live band. With twenty years on the music scene, it's a good time to reflect on what they have achieved and doing so they have released a best of comprising two volumes and 33 songs, representing the best of Risager's studio and live albums to date. I'm always a bit dubious of these kinds of records because we would all pick our favourite tracks and we all have different tastes, that said every track on this two-volume set is excellent. Volume one spans from 2004 to 2012 kicking off with Rock 'n' Roll Ride, and that's what this collection delivers, a roller coaster of a journey as the band eases their way through various styles with aplomb. Whether it's the down and dirty front porch blues of On My Way or the following big band shuffle of You Better Pay Attention, you might prefer the rough hewn vocals on the riff driven Love Turned Cold or the rich smooth vocals on the soulful ballad Stand By Me. You could be up dancing to the JJ Cale esq In The Back Of My Mind or pondering the unhurried blues of Ain't Gonna Leave No More. Volume two takes us from 2014 - 2021, full of more great tunes like the live funky jazz of Paradise, the more straightforward blues of Last Train, or maybe the smooth soulful I Used To Love You. The haunting emotional cover of China Gate or the rootsy slide of Too Many Roads, the soulful Through The Tears tugs at the heartstrings while Come On In and Long Forgotten Track are a cou-ple of laidback blues before closing with the new single Same Old Lies showing that there is no slowing down yet for these guys. My album of the year.

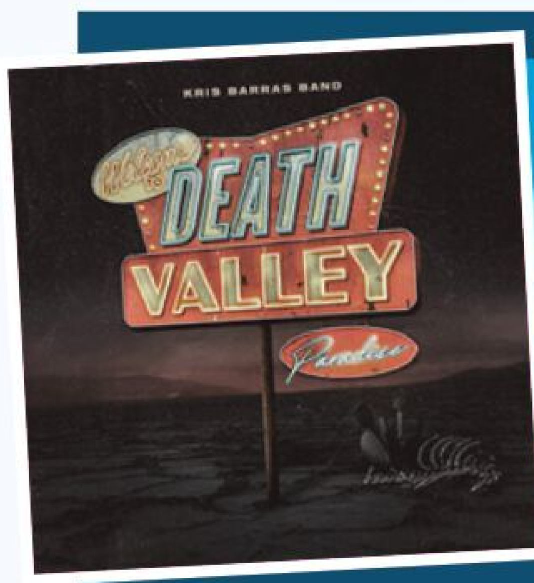
SHIRL

ZOE WILCOX

BREAKING THE CHRYSALIS

INDEPENDENT

To be honest I am a bit con-fused by my reaction to this album. Zoe's voice is not the strongest you will ever



KRIS BARRAS

DEATH VALLEY PARADISE

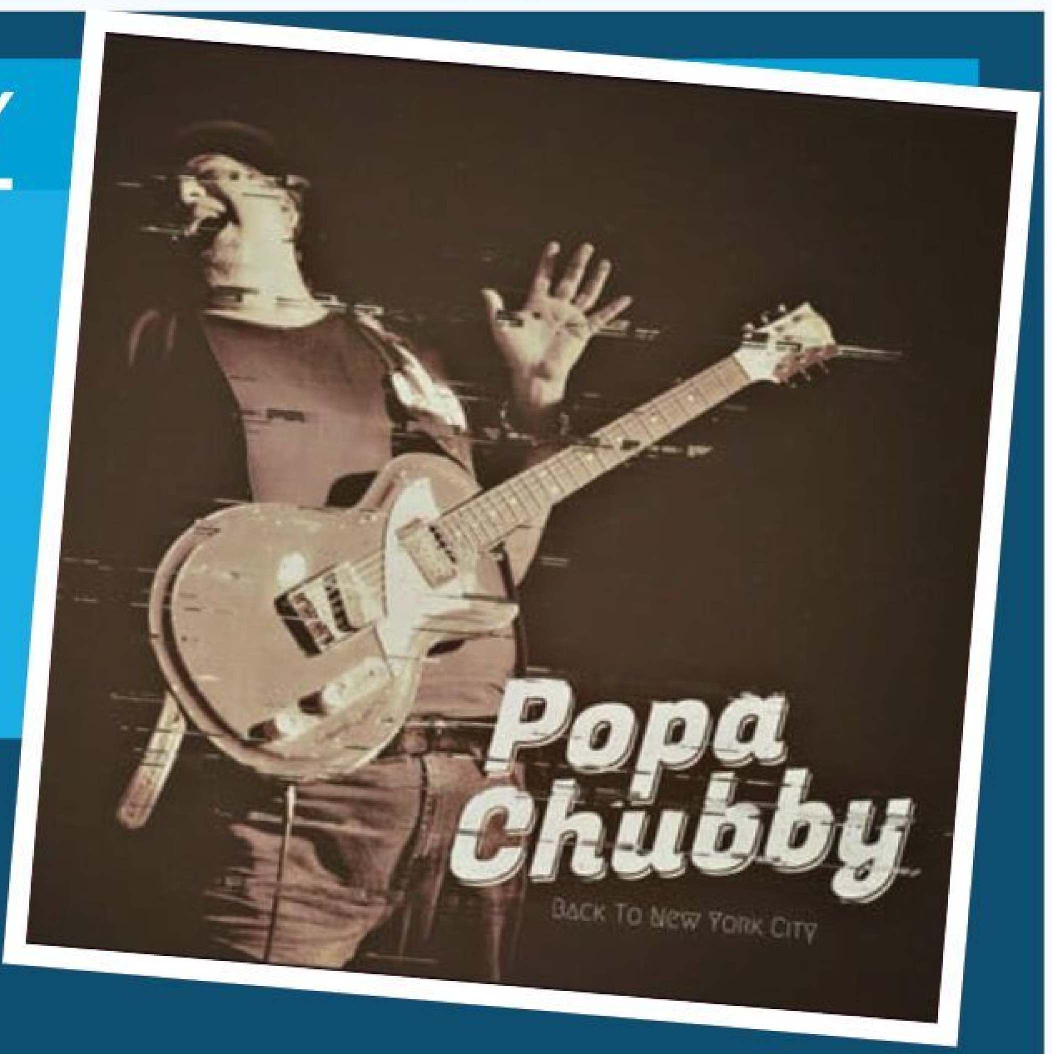
Mascot/Provogue

Kris Barras just keeps getting better as he proves on every track on his fifth solo album where there is more than the usual quotient of teeth-rattling riffs, coruscating chorus', and venomous verses elevating this coherent release to 'best yet' status. This fifth offering harmonises his prodigious talents into a headstrong and heady mix of blues-soaked musical stylings. His aggressively nuanced guitar approach is backed up by confident vocals. However, it's the quality of the tunes on display screaming sheer class that wins through. And songs, being the bedrock that allows showmanship to fly, is where it's always at as Death Valley Paradise lifts off with the rumbling pow-er of Dead Horses that welcomes the listener with an opener that immediately dispels any notion of a safe re-tread back to previous musical journeys. Long Gone similarly summarises this no messing with the kid attitude with an unrestrained strutting menace that rivets the listener to the spot. With a lean run-ning time of forty minutes, Barass detonates fierce ruminations on the pent-up frustrations and wasted years of the pandemic lockdown which explode with a biting passion on the withering protest song My Parade. Grunged up belting riffs - clearly taking notes from Billy Gibbons - and classy melodic blues-rock tropes will ensure that songs such as these and the groove-some These Voices, Who Needs Enemies and Devil You Know will enjoy plenty of heavy rock radio rotation; especially with the copious blistering guitar solos throughout showcasing Barras' highly developed skills as a musician of note. Where there is plenty of grit there's also the smooth as Wake Me When It's Over is a show-stopping live anthem, with a sizzling guitar solo, in need of audience appreciation. This, and Bury Me's blues ballad, beautifully balances the superb weighty collection of bluesy bangers on parade here. Yet it's the crawling vocal and guitar riff on Cigarettes and Gasoline and album closer Chaos that reveals a heavier bottom end on show than a backstreet Brazilian butt enhancement catalogue. Born out of his recent personal period of deep dark-ness, Barras has hauled himself out of a seemingly limitless depression and, collaborating with quality songwriters such as Jonny Andrews, Bob Marlette, Blair Daly, and Zac Maloy, is back on solid gold ground unshackled from his lockdown millstone as this career milestone album completely defines Kris Barras' existence as a true-blue star.

PAUL DAVIES

POPA CHUBBY

BACK TO NEW YORK CITY



Dixiefrog Records

You know where you are with a Popa Chubby record. Not that I'm saying that all his records sound the same. Well, actually, I am saying that all his records sound the same. But that's not necessarily a bad thing and, to his credit, this is the first one I recall that sees him preforming some Johan Sebastian Bach.

And, no, I'm not kidding. Now I happen to like what Popa Chubby does, but this isn't going to win any naysayers over as he concentrates on giving the people what they want. Which are fiery seventies styled blues rock with a big (big) emphasis on the rock. The title track blasts things off and straight away he's riffing like a man possessed.

At times he teeters on the edge of bludgeon but if you have a fondness for seventies Leslie West or Frank Marino then you're going to find a lot to enjoy here. Although it's mainly balls to the wall stuff, he does take a break now and then. That means,

"You know where you are with a Popa Chubby record"

surprisingly, that the big ballad Pound Of Flesh is a real standout. It's got hints of southern rock, some delightful acoustic guitar and an impassioned vocal turn.

There are a couple of fillers like Keep Your Woodpile Dry which no-one needs to hear a second time, but the standard of songwriting is generally high. Oh, and I wasn't kidding about Bach. There really is a version of Jesus Joy Of Man Desire here or, as pedants would have it, Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring. Bach won't be turning in his Leipzig grave but he's probably having a bit of a fever dream.

One for the faithful but an extra point for thanking his Tai Chi teacher in the credits.

STUART A HAMILTON

set your ears a-listening to. The playing throughout is simple and uncomplicated. In short there is nothing here that challenges you or pushes any boundaries. Having said that after a couple of listens there is something quite unfathomable which allows the music to get to you. It appears to have been recorded in her home in Santa Fe and I can only surmise that she has gathered around her a raft of local musicians. Those turn out to be rather good at what they do mixing as they do elements of country, folk, bluegrass and touches of blues. Looking astonishingly like Helen Mirren on the cover there are, some twelve originals, and no covers. I like the way the violin weaves in and out the material giving it a truly natural feeling. You come away with the idea that you have sat in her garden watching the band playing on the back porch. I guess that is what makes Breaking The Chrysalis get inside of you. By a process of osmosis you absorb the feeling of the natural whilst overlooking the shortcomings of Zoe's vocals. So yes, not the strongest album of the year by long way, but full credit to Zoe for following her dreams and laying down some real home produced music.

GRAEME SCOTT

modern Latin sound of Lleno De Vida! - more than a little Santana-ish in the guitar break, and the swampy, funky The Gator Groove. Many of these songs sound like they've come straight out of the Bayou country. 'Gros Coup' is just one fine example of what I mean, with its mixture of English and French vocals and relentless groove, but these guys have surnames like Kraus, Schwarz, Klenner, Kuesters, and Dreyfuss-Wilde, so no, this isn't Rosie Ledet's backing band and yes, this is a German outfit. That doesn't make the slightest difference to the listener's enjoyment, of course. Rock out with the good timing, pull out all the stops title track, or shake a leg to some border sounds with the wonderful Tex-Mex of Una Cerveza Y Dos Copa De Vino, with its hint maybe of Los Lobos. Really though you can't go wrong whichever of these baker's dozens of tracks you pick, they'll all bring a big smile to your face and make you want to jump around. And if you're looking just for the blues, then the closing slowish instrumental Last Island, with its tinges of Hendrix and Santana in Volker Kenner's guitar playing may well provide just what you need.

NORMAN DARWEN

ZYDECO PLAYBOYS

JUST DO IT

TIMEZONE

This is a wonderfully varied set from this driving five-piece outfit, from the straight-ahead accordion-powered Louisiana zydeco of C'Est Tout Y A (though the guitar solo moves it a little closer to the mellower side of 70s rock) and the strutting cover of Chuck Berry's You Never Can Tell (C'Est La Vie) to the

WILLIE JACKSON

ALL IN THE BLUES

ROSZAK CD

Classic stuff. Born in Savannah, Georgia, began playing in church, playing drums and singing in the choir. Willie Jackson is a terrific and hefty vocalist, bass player and blues songwriter, plus a man of mischievous wit, which is established with the opening track, I'm Your Landlord. These

twelve tracks mainly rock along with some lively support, especially from Jimmy Brown's horns and some spirited girl singers, Toi Wilkerson and Dana Henry. The song Beautiful Disease is bound to raise a smile with its pointed lyrics, smart piano and wailing brass. Stranger in my Hole is a great number which benefits from a truly demonic tempo (the kettle drum takes you by surprise, as does the atmospheric flute) and the overall dramatic production leaves you with the impression that this would be a great number for a movie soundtrack. You'll be smiling again with the impulsive rolling beat of Sticky Hands Blues. Give me My Rib Back opens with some moody harp from Edsel Robinson. Hey Gangster, is a father's angry warning with the words "That's my daughter, Mister, I heard that you hit her, that's my daughter over there…" needless to say the Gangster in question ends up somewhat worse for wear in an alley. Coon Hound Nose with its sniping, lurking harmonica is true urban blues Willie Dixon style. This is a thoroughly enjoyable blues album by an artist who rides the tradition's rails like a Baldwin locomotive. Solid, electrifying, it ticks all the right boxes.

ROY BAINTON

CHARLIE BARATH

JUST ME AND MY FRIEND(S)

INDEPENDENT

An album of almost all original blues tunes by a harmonica player is a true rarity and Charlie Barath is just that, a rare find to treasure as this album has in spades. Not only an obvious master of the mouth organ, but Barath also possesses a praiseworthy voice that crosses the musical streams of blues and country to equally mighty fine effect. This contrast manifests itself on the gritty blues of Ohio and the country yodel on Losin' My Mind Over You. Also, on the Hank Williams inspired Little Turtle Nightlight and The Forgotten Man doomsday blues about Chinese immigrants who constructed the transcontinental railroad. There are plenty of blues' stylings on this record that speaks volumes for Barath's encyclopaedic knowledge of this universal genre. Interestingly, the country blues of Mississippi Bound and the title track could have been plucked from the folksier blues end of the Led Zeppelin songbook, no less. Barath has corralled together an impressive ensemble of nineteen musicians who all contribute an impressive array of musical skills particularly guitarist Jimmy Adler who blows a mighty storm of spooky licks that lights up No Smoking which along with Much Better Now exudes an understanding of the corkier side of the blues. As much is true with the fulsome whimsy on show on instrumental The Briar Hopper. With exception of the album closer One Way Gal, the seventeen original tunes on this impressive record consolidate Barath as a consummate blues songwriter and musician.

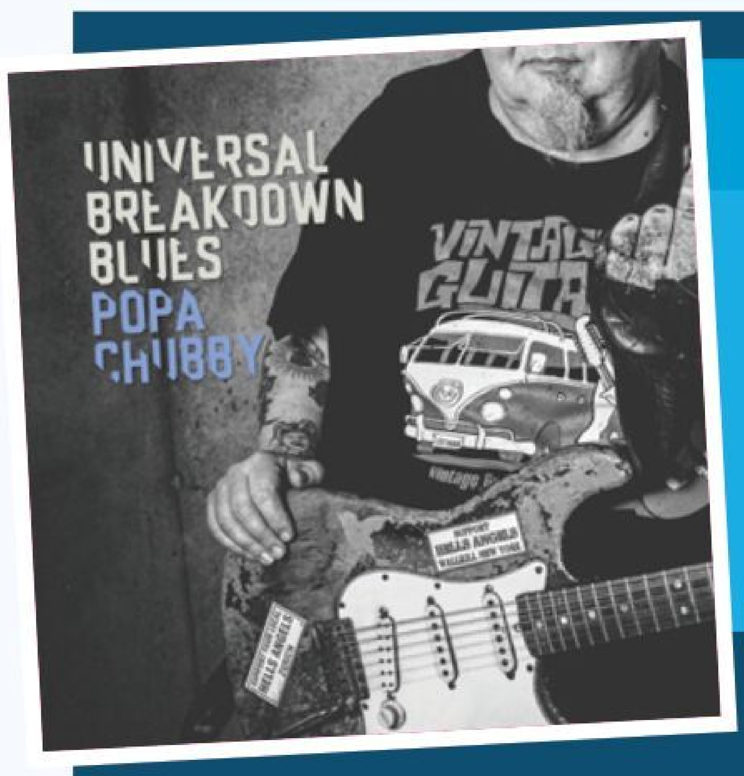
PAUL DAVIES

BB AND THE BLUES SHACKS

BREAKING POINT

RHYTHM BOMB RECORDS

An album from our German blues friends is always welcome here at BM Towers. As is the unwritten rule, the



POPA CHUBBY

UNIVERSAL BREAKDOWN BLUES

Dixie Frog Records

Popa Chubby has been around the blues scene for many years, performing in America and Europe, most notably France in recent years. The opening track on the album, I Don't Want Nobody, sees Popa in familiar form.

Funky bluesy guitar with brilliant backing from some fine musicians. Not only is Popa adept at singing and playing, he's also a very good songwriter as is proven on this album. I Ain't Giving Up, features a protégé of his, Sari Schorr who joins Popa on vocals on this smooth ballad-type tune. He encouraged Sari to pursue her solo career after she had cut her chops performing with his band for quite a few years. It was a wise move on her part, her backing vocals are superb here.

"This album is magnificent"

The title track, Universal Breakdown Blues, sees Popa right where he belongs, slap bang in the middle of the blues. Erik Boyd on bass and Dave Keyes on piano help to make this a barnstormer of a blues tune. It seems to sum up what this whole album is all about, the blues, pure and simple. 69 Dollars is possibly my favourite track on the album. Funky, soulful, and full of blues.

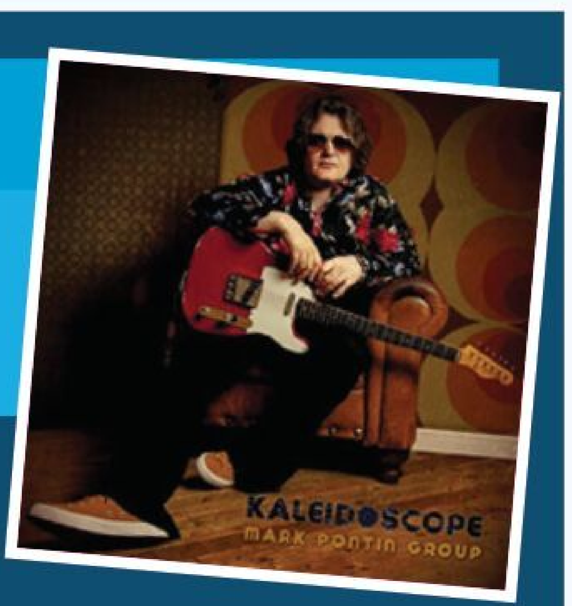
It's not an easy thing to combine all three genres into one song and make it work but make it work he does. The album is so good, so full of amazing musicianship from every angle. There is an eight-minute live version of Somewhere Over The Rainbow thrown in for good measure as well.

It demonstrates the diversity of Popa Chubby's playing, giving the listener a bit of a breather before he launches into, I Need A Lil' Mojo. He is joined once more on vocals by Sari Schorr, who tears the vocals to shreds with ease. The album concludes with a brilliant version of the Lou Reed classic, Walk On The Wild Side merging funk and blues over the top of fantastic lyrics.

This album is magnificent.

STEPHEN HARRISON

MARK PONTIN GROUP
KALEIDOSCOPE



Lunaria Records CD

It's big, ambitious and Welsh, and as the band's website tells us, 'The album's concept will certainly be relatable to some, about a guy who wakes up one day to find the love of his life has gone, and literally taken everything with her. Complete with strings and brass section, the musicianship alone marks this album as a true masterpiece.' Mark Pontin, vocals and guitar wrote all 13 numbers.

There's some rugged blues here, for instance the heavy Starmaker and the atmospheric Hell's Kitchen, but what makes this album stand out is the versatility of the group both creatively and instrumentally. I thought I was listening to Steely Dan on the jazzy instrumental Hotel Diablo, with some deft guitar interplay between Pontin and keyboards

"The Mark Pontin Group represent Welsh musical talent at it's finest"

wizard Owain Hughes. There's plenty to get your blues teeth into with the satisfying riffs of Freeway Fantasy and the meaty Don't Sleep. But this is a collection of contrasts. The title Roll With Me Easy immediately suggests an urban blues, but it's a beautiful nostalgic meditation complete with strings. Pontin handles these well-crafted songs with sensitive skill. The cinematic final track, Phoenix, has an accompanying World War 1 video on the band's website wherein a soldier leaves the trenches and gives up on killing. The music matches it all. The Mark Pontin Group represent Welsh musical talent at it's finest, and this is a CD they can be truly proud of.

ROY BAINTON

IMAGE: ROB LLOYD PHTOGRAPHY

only way you can actually tell that this is written and recorded by artists working in their second language, is the Germanic monikers on the sleeve, in terms of sound and atmosphere, this album sounds as British or American as anything that drops through our letterbox. The album sleeve shows a collection of gentlemen getting ready to play some blues in a club, all sepia tones and old-school styling. The music however, is far more muscular and big-band sounding, lots of horns up front in the mix. If this is your thing, this is probably something you will really like. If not, it possibly won't convert you. It's not that the songs are not played well, very well, it's more that they lack the magic ingredient that sets them apart from so many other bands releasing this type of material. The main problem seems to be Michael Arlt, whose vocals do not come anywhere near to matching his harmonica skills, or the rest of the band's peerless musicianship. But since the vocal is the front and centre of vocal blues music, it needs a seriously charismatic voice to do the heavy lifting. That is especially true in a busy and very full-sounding musical landscape, where the vocals are constantly in danger of sinking beneath a welter of keyboards and horns. The songs themselves are fine, I just feel that they would sound a lot better if they were sung by someone with more variation of delivery. I would take an educated guess that That Ain't All is voiced by Andreas Alt, because the vocal is far stronger. If I am in error, and it is actually Michael, then my advice is that you use this stronger and more commanding voice for everything you record in future. A good collection of songs diluted by the delivery, but nothing that's not easily fixable.

ANDY HUGHES

BILL FILIPIAK
MEDICINE I NEED

REVOLVER RECORDS LTD

Wow. What an opening to a very good album, the all- harmonica atmosphere on this old town Western blues song, When The Blues Come Calling. Bill Filipiaks voice is deep, rich and, on this particular track, he is in story telling mode so it's kind of the talky singing voice like story tellers of old times gone by. As a producer of the most hallowed of Nashville roots music institutions, the Grand Ol Opry, Bill has rubbed shoulders and learnt from some of the finest Americana artists around and all of that learning and talent is on every track of this amazing album. Amazing because, this is Filipiak's third full length album with 9 tracks, was recorded, engineered, produced and he played every single instrument. There is so much back story to this album, about the influences, all fascinating and relevant, but so much that I am unable to cover it all, suffice to say, family and the loss of it and the renewed hope that comes from those left around you is one of the biggies. Pure Blues, feelings, atmosphere, stories, music all with deep influences felt throughout from down home country blues to folk and Americana. It's just astonishing to know that this album, in every aspect, comes through one man's talent.

JEAN KNAPPITT

CIRCLE OF MUD
CIRCLE OF MUD

DIXIE FROG MUSIC

Circle of Mud have created an original blend of heavy rock and bluesy lyricism

in their eponymous debut release. With a definite influence of Led Zeppelin, and other hard rock bands. The highly rhythmic soundscapes on the album and the guitar playing of lead singer and songwriter Flo Bauer, the Lap Steel guitar of Gino Monachello, and the double bass of Franck Bedez keep the album on the less intense side of heavy rock, but when they want to kick it in, they can, as the wah-wah guitar solo on Native Man shows. Their cover of Staying Alive by The Bee Gees takes liberties with the original arrangement but is still an intriguing, and original heavy rock reading of a disco classic. Lead singer Flo Bauer also has a hand in most of the songs, with opener Free Me From The Devil, Victim of Love and the solo written I Remember all being fine examples of his talent. Victim of Love has something of a sound akin to middle era Chris Rea, its rootsy guitar figure, and thick toned lap steel guitar part adding to the impression. Coming Back is a gentle ballad, with something of Dave Gilmour's aural signature in the guitar, and gently played lap steel guitar. Pretty Baby is a lively rootsy rocker, allowing for a fine drum contribution from Matthieu Zirn. Circle of Mud are a talented band, with strong musicianship at the forefront, and a charismatic vocalist in Flo Bauer. They are a band to watch on the international blues scene.

BEN MACNAIR

COREY HARRIS

THE INSURRECTION BLUES

BOOS RECORDS

This is Corey's twentieth release and his first for three years. He produced this with Simone Scifoni in Atri, Italy. Other than two songs; the quirky spiritual, When Did You Leave Heaven where Lino Muoio plays mandolin and on the up-tempo instrumental, Afton Mountain Blues where Phil Wiggins plays harmonica, Corey plays solo guitar and sings all songs. For this release he goes back to explore traditional blues with a distinct West African twist. Corey wrote four, including Mama Africa which is a raw acoustic version of the tune he played on his last album Free Water Way, a stunning mix of guitar styles and sweet vocals. The opener, Twelve Gates To The City sees him weave a Gospel style lyric whilst picking some great guitar style. Traditional blues gets no better than his take of Charlie Patton's Some Of These Days, such a pure and honest take to this. Toubaka exhibits his wonderful finger style technique as does Sunjata which has an infectious hypnotic rhythm, African influences on the chord structure here, his guitar technique is stunning and fresh, spellbinding at times. Take the title track Insurrection Blues; He sings and delivers lines with sincerity and insight, very powerful song subtitled Chickens Come Home To Roost. Boats Up River and By And By brighten the mood. Then the two Blind Blake interpretations, You Gonna Quit Me Baby and That Will Happen No More mix traditional with contemporary tones. Another instrumental Scottsville Breakdown closes this very enjoyable release.

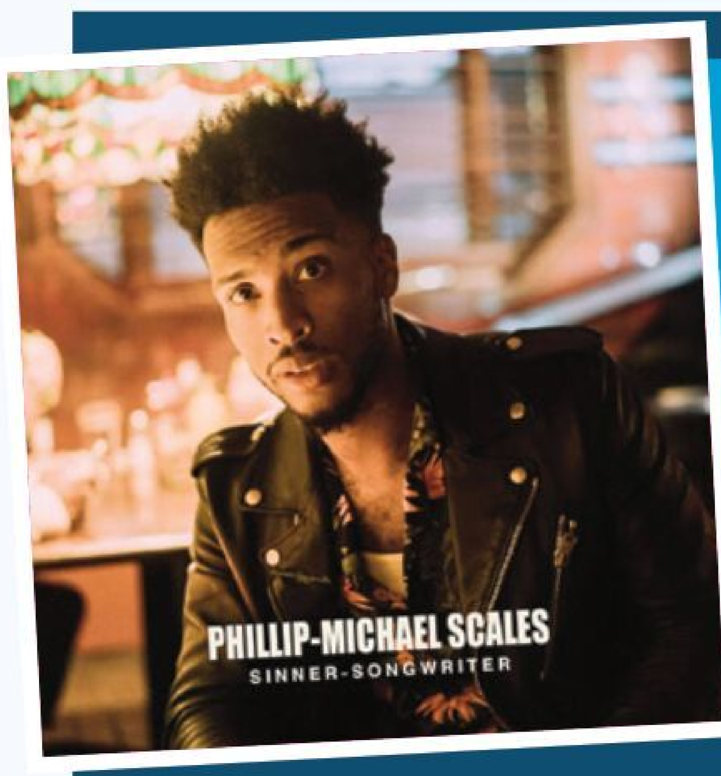
COLIN CAMPBELL

DAVID VEST

LIVE IN CALGARY

CORDOVA BAY RECORDS

Canadian David Vest has



PHILLIP-MICHAEL SCALES

SINNER-SONGWRITER

Dixie Frog

As Phillip was growing up, he had an awareness of an uncle who played blues guitar for a living, but he shied away from the blues and playing solos. He subsequently fronted his own Indie Rock/Pop Bands, using the moniker Briar Rabbit who released a couple of albums although it wasn't long before he got drawn back into the blues and found the music suited his style. He now performs under his own name mixing blues with Indie Rock styles he calls "Dive Bar Soul". By the way his uncle was the late great B.B.King. Phillip is a very dominant front man playing electric guitar and delivering exceptionally strong vocals.

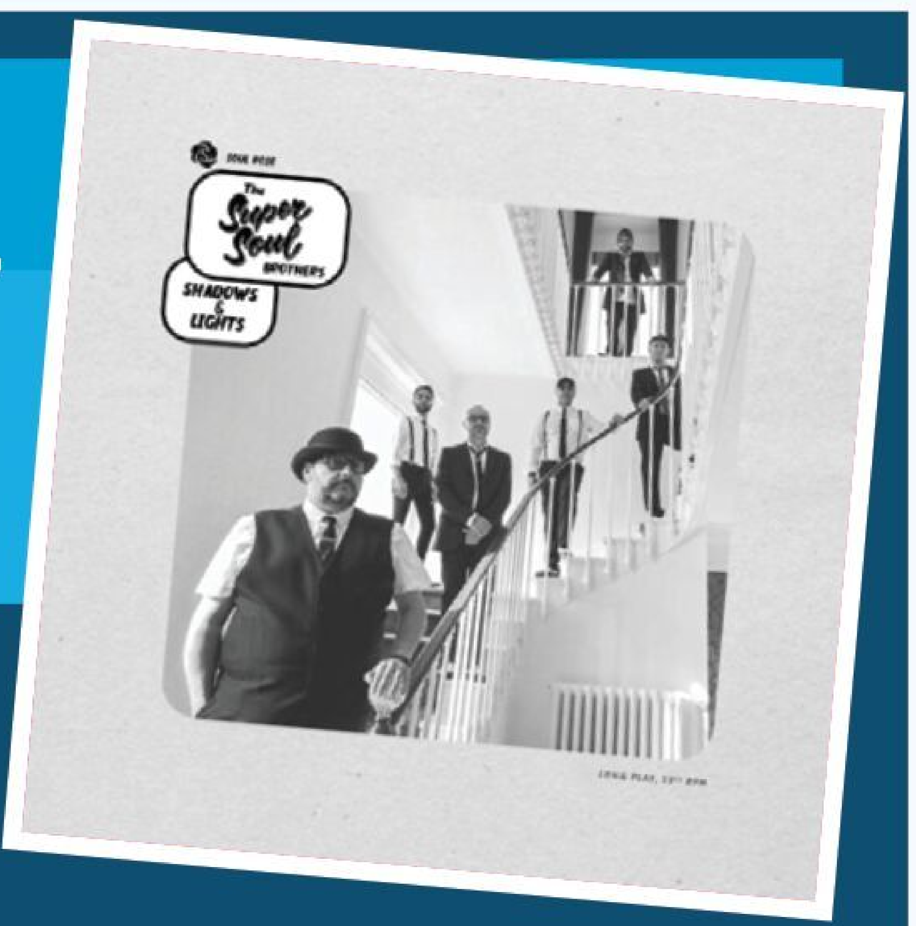
At times this is pure rock music with an underlying blues feeling although there are a couple of slower paced songs, the highlight of these is Go Easy On Me where Phillip shows his versatility with a soulful vocal performance aided by some subtle backing vocal arrangements by Kristin Brooks. On this album session players provide the backing support, and all do a cracking job, aided by a couple of guests including John Lee Hooker's nephew Archie Lee Hooker who performs a good vocal on When they Put Me In My Grave. All the fourteen songs on the album have been written by Phillip highlighting another strength. Towards the end of the album there are a couple of stripped back songs where you really appreciate Phillip's vocal strengths when accompanied by just an acoustic guitar. This album is an excellent debut and is full of great songs with blues influences, the most positive note is that he is not trying to imitate B.B.King's work but has created his own strong identity.

"Phillip is a very dominant front man playing electric guitar and delivering exceptionally strong vocals"

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

THE SUPERSOUL BROTHERS

SHADOWS & LIGHTS



DIXIE FROG

New to me and with no press release, it was time to hit the world wide web and track these guys down. According to the Internet they are a six-piece band with Pyrenean roots in the Salies-de-Béarn Region of France. Formed three years ago The SuperSoul Brothers release their debut album Shadows & Light for the legendary Dixie frog Records Label. The SuperSoul Brothers are David Noël Lead and Backing Vocals, Ludovic Timoteo Bass and Backing Vocals, Fabrice Seny-Couty Drums and Backing Vocals, Pierre-Antoine Dumora Guitars and Backing Vocals, Julien Stantau Organs, Pianos and Backing Vocals and Julien Suhubiette Slide Trombone and Backing Vocals. The album consists of nine originals and three covers split into the shadow part and the light part. This band love their soul and have captured a vintage Chicago Stax rhythm and blues soul vibe with a nod to some of their favourite artists of that era. The album starts with the powerful and gritty vocals of

"A good fun first album which shows a lot of promise for the future of these guys"

Don't "Lockdown " Your Heart. Next is the light and breezy summer funky soul of Only Love, which flows into the uptempo foot tapper How Shall We Dance Life? Title track Shadows & Lights follows with special guest Claire Rousselot-Paillez on lead vocals on this organ driven popish song. A grooving rhythm and blues cover of Coming Home Baby is followed by the wonderful stripped-down piano and vocal ballad cover of Bobby Womack's Please Forgive My Heart. The light's part sees the band deliver more uptempo grooving songs with Common People soon getting the body moving again, and Sookie Sookie Baby could quite easily sit alongside a Wilson Pickett number or two. The album closes out with a rip rhythm and blues version of Bowie's Heroes I dare you to stay still. A good fun first album which shows a lot of promise for the future of these guys.

SHIRL

released an eleven-track live album recorded in Calgary at the Calgary International Blues Festival. It opens with the blues romp Genevieve written by Huey P. Smith allowing Peter Dammann on electric guitar to perform a solo with such ease. Fourteen Dollars In The Bank is a tale of a man down on his luck with Vest on vocals and piano. Party In The Room Next Door will appeal to Jools Holland fans with its boogie-woogie sensibilities whilst the steady bass riff courtesy of Ryan Tandy keeps things moving on Shake What You Got as Dammann joins forces with fellow guitarist Tom Bowler. In listening to this record I am reminded of pianist Charlie Wood with his charm and powerful lyrics. Heart Full Of Rock And Roll (great title imho) could give the opportunity for an anthemic number like Whitesnake' s bluesy cuts but it sticks with standard blues time with "cornbread and buttermilk fine on my plate" lyrics opting for the at home vibe. Wrapping up with the relatable Worried About The World hears David Vest in sense of acceptance, and I must give kudos to Damian Graham for a fine drum sound. Overall, Live In Calgary is an album that wants to play a slick blues set without taking too many musical risks for a festival audience and I would say that they have certainly achieved that although it does at times seem formulaic.

GLENN SARGEANT

DAVIS HALL & THE GREEN LANTERNS

SELF-TITLED

INDEPENDENT

You can look for 'Davis Hall' on any of these ten esoteric blues instrumentals and you'll not find him. The man in the driving seat with the mythical Green Lanterns here is ace drummer, sampler and synth bassist Jim Casson, whose website describes as a 'professional percussionist / educator / producer / promoter / web and graphic designer / farmer / father / husband.' Like a lot of slick, sophisticated contemporary blues, this potent, classily produced CD appears to hail from Ontario in Canada.
The rhythmic opening track, Temperanceville, is a sheer delight with some terrific drum patterns and Wayne Bradder and Mike Branton's matching guitars underpinned by a cheeky tuba played by N. Jay Burr. The infectious percussion persists throughout the ten tracks, and Casson's command of those drums draws you in and creates an almost jazzy, New Orleans ambience. Now and then a sample of radio news kicks in. There's also sampling from Ray Charles and The Crickets. It's great to have what is essentially a blues album yet, just for a change, one without lyrics. For example, the track The Right Road to Boyle bounces steadily into the wide-open prairie sounds of Finding Tintern, with Steve Mariner's haunting harmonica solo and some ethereal echoing vocals which seem to hide behind mountains of mysterious sound. A stand-out track, which opens with a 1960s radio jingle, is White Pigeon, four minutes of frisky funk that'll have you dancing around the room. If you fancy discovering where instrumental blues is going in the 21st century, this is the record you need. Highly satisfying stuff indeed.

ROY BAINTON

E D BRAYSHAW

RANDOM REPEAT

MESCAL CANYON RECORDS

That's E space D Brayshaw not Ed Brayshaw. Something that is really messing with my head. If it turns out he really is called Ed, then some form of payback will definitely be due. Anyway, who he? Well, he released his début solo album Fire Without Water last year and has also released a record with Wily Bo Walker, The Roads We Ride. So, he's been keeping himself busy. He's also a bit of a musical show off as he plays guitars, bass, drums, dobro, lap steel, banjo, mandolin and keyboards as well as doing the singing and songwriting. Three of the tracks have Lee Feltham on drums but that aside, this is a proper, proper solo album. He does most of those things well and if you're a fan of blues rock guitar solos then you're going to have a rare old time here. One of the things he doesn't do well is sing so tread carefully if you're not into the world of world-weary, lived-in voices (© ® ™ every music journalist who likes Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan). However, he can write a decent tune even if some of them (three) appeared on the Wily Bo Walker collaboration a couple of years back. He's at his best when he takes a sideways step away from the blues rock which is what makes Probably Correct such a standout. It seems like it shouldn't work what with it having a jazz rhythm, an almost spoken word vocal and a searing guitar solo that runs through the whole thing. But it's utterly fabulous! There I said it. Fabulous! He even closes with a cover of the Sidney Bechet jazz standard Petite Fleur although I'm not proud and am happy to admit it was the Chris Barber hit version I remember. It's interesting rather than essential but I'm glad I heard it.

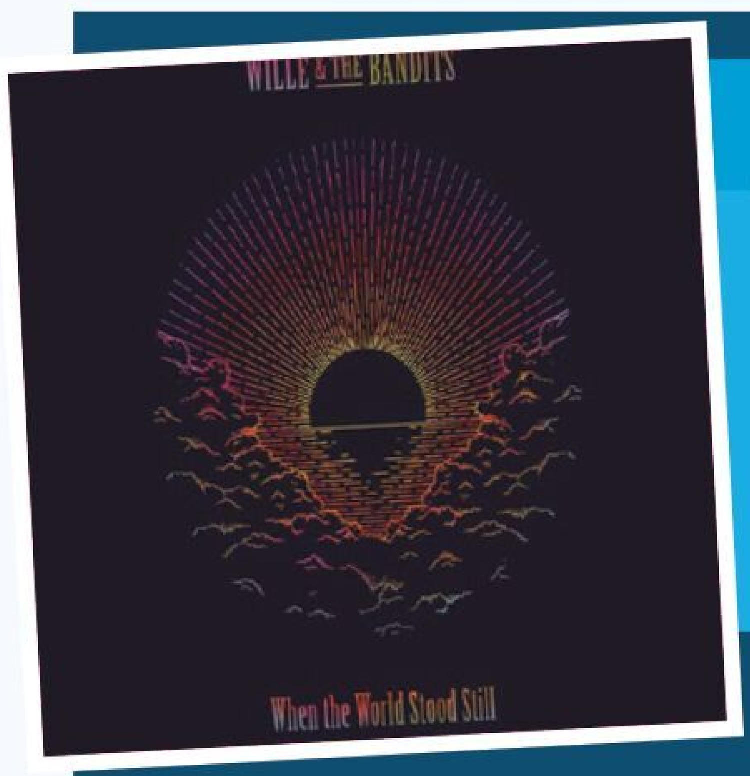
STUART A HAMILTON

ELIAS BERNET BAND

BETTER OFF WITH THE BLUES

INDEPENDENT

Seriously impressive keyboard chops from bandleader Elias Bernet, who covers a wide range of 12-bar moods and related genres on this all original 15-track set. My educated guess would be that this guy listens to a lot of Allen Toussaint, as witnessed by such obviously New Orleans-flavoured tunes as Johnny The Roller and Easy Target For The Blues. Play something sweet, play something mellow indeed. But there's more to Bernet than that. Take the funk-tinged Monkey Juice, built on a riff that lodges its way into your brain even on first play. Slow blues Heavy Load is deftly handled, and rock and influenced numbers such as A Little R'n'R allow the bandleader to get his Jerry Lee Lewis on. Bernet boogie-woogies like Meade Lux Lewis on Light That Fire, while the title track could be an outtake from one of those Jimmy Smith Hammond organ jazz albums Blue Note put out in the 1960s. It's fair to observe that all the genres covered are somewhat traditional, but the effervescence of the musicianship makes up for any familiarity in the terrain. It's all piano and B3-led, with able assistance from Markus Fritzsche on double bass and Bernhard Egger on drums, and no pesky guitarists getting in



Wille & The Bandits

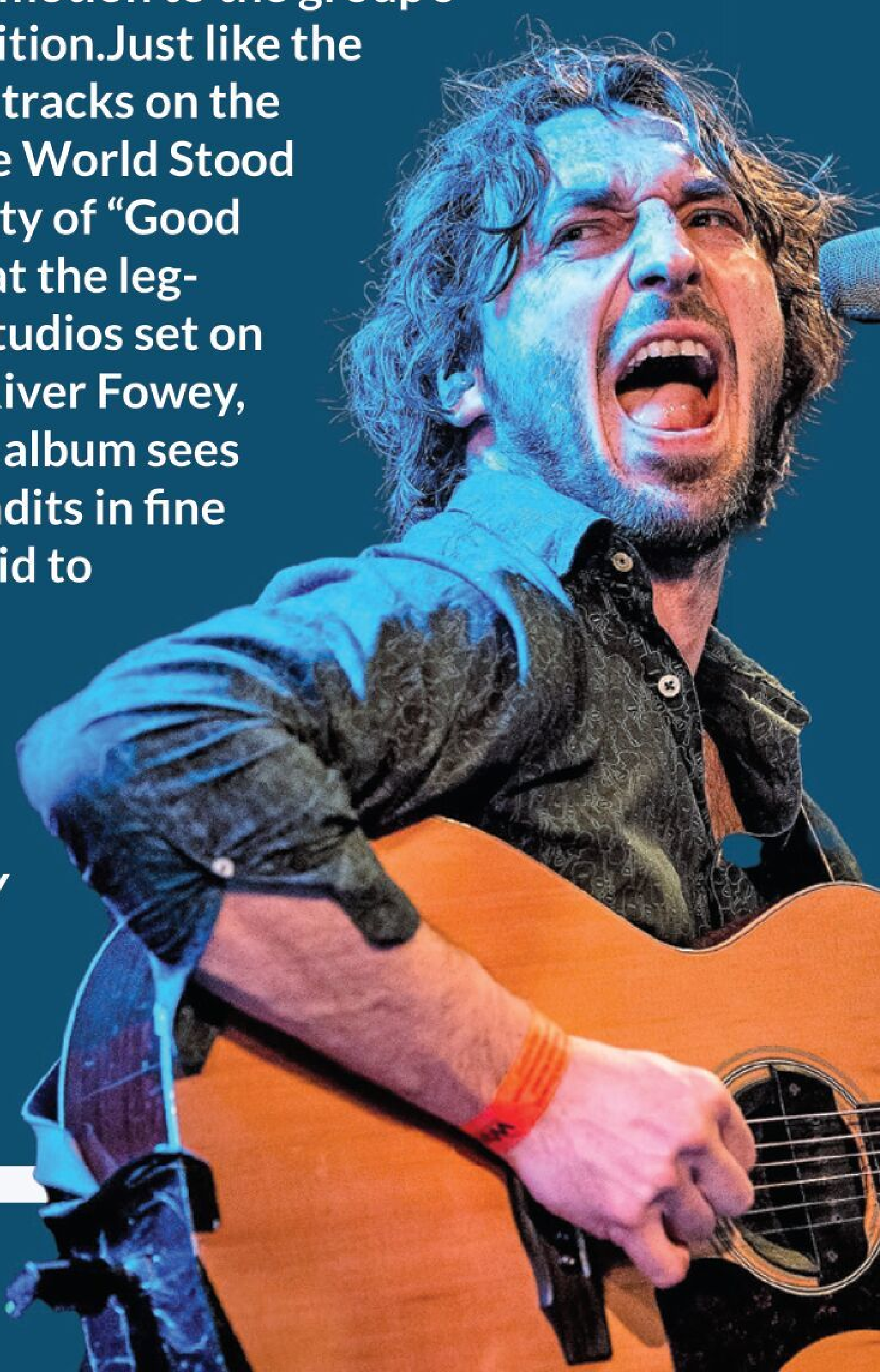
WHEN THE WORLD STOOD STILL

Fat Toad Records

Perhaps we can all relate to the title of the latest release from Cornish blues/rockers Wille and the Bandits. With memories of the first lockdown still fresh in our minds, the title 'When The World Stood Still' takes the listener back to a time in the UK when we were only permitted one hour a day to go out for exercise, and everyone was stuck at home. On the South Coast of England, where frontman Wille Edwards resides, the beaches were clear in what is usually a surfing and fishing hotspot. These strange times were food for thought and a cause of great inspiration for the artist.At the top of the album, the genre-defying opening track "Caught In The Middle" highlights the group's contemporary sound and their vast array of musical influences. During the album, the band seamlessly blur the boundaries of a multitude of musical sounds and stylings. Throughout the release, Edwards delivers each song with passion and conviction, particularly on numbers such as "I'm Alive" and the epic that is "Without You".

Whilst the group illustrates the funkier side of their repertoire with tracks such as "In This Together" and the standout "Move To Fast". The frontman showcases his exceptional slide playing skills during the groove-heavy "Will We Ever" and album closer "Solid Ground". During the latter of which Edwards' appreciation of space during this slow blues number adds drama and emotion to the group's beautiful composition.Just like the title of one of the tracks on the album, 'When The World Stood Still' is full of plenty of "Good Stuff". Recorded at the legendary Sawmill Studios set on the picturesque River Fowey, the group's latest album sees Wille and the Bandits in fine form and not afraid to push or challenge their musical boundaries.

ADAM KENNEDY



RMR TOP 50

Roots Music Report's Blues album chart

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
1	COLIN JAMES	OPEN ROAD	STONY PLAIN
2	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	TEMPTING FATE	ALLIGATOR
3	TOMMY CASTRO	A BLUESMAN CAME TO TOWN	ALLIGATOR
4	SUE FOLEY	PINKY'S BLUES	STONY PLAIN
5	CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM	662	ALLIGATOR
6	DION	STOMPING GROUND	KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE
7	CHICKENBONE SLIM	SERVE IT TO ME HOT	VIZZTONE
8	ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND	HOLLER IF YOU HEAR ME	BLIND PIG
9	JON SPEAR BAND	B-SIDE OF MY LIFE	SELF-RELEASE
10	SAMANTHA FISH	FASTER	ROUNDER
11	COLIN LINDEN	BLOW	HIGHWAY 20
12	DIONNE BENNETT	SUGAR HIP YA YA	HUNNIA
13	LITTLE G WEEVIL	LIVE ACOUSTIC SESSION(LIVE)	HUNNIA
14	BUFFALO NICHOLS	BUFFALO NICHOLS	FAT POSSUM
15	HANNA PK	BLUES ALL OVER MY SHOES	VIZZTONE
16	RICCI / KROWN	CITY COUNTRY CITY	GULF COAST
17	TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND	LAYLA REVISITED(LIVE AT LOCKN')	CONCORD
18	TERESA JAMES & THE RHYTHM TRAMPS	ROSE-COLORED GLASSES, VOL. 1	BLUE HEART
19	DAVE SPECTER	SIX STRING SOUL: 30 YEARS ON DELMARK	DELMARK
20	JOHNNY TUCKER	75 AND ALIVE	BLUE HEART
21	ZAC HARMON	LONG AS I GOT MY GUITAR	CATFOOD
22	MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD	DO RIGHT, SAY RIGHT	ANOTHER PLANET
23	GOV'T MULE	HEAVY LOAD BLUES	CONCORD
24	CHRIS CAIN	RAISIN' CAIN	ALLIGATOR
25	GUITAR JACK WARGO	TIL THE MONEY'S GONE	WAR GOD
26	DAVID GOGO	SILVER CUP	CORDOVA BAY
27	THORBJORN RISAGER & THE BLACK TORNADO	BEST OF	RUF
28	JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR	THE BLUES ALBUM	KEEPING THE BLUES ALIVE
29	BEN LEVIN	STILL HERE	VIZZTONE
30	EDDIE 9V	LITTLE BLACK FLIES	RUF
31	TONY HOLIDAY	PORCH SESSIONS, VOL. 2	BLUE HEART
32	STACY MITCHHART	PRINTERS ALLEY	SELF-RELEASE
33	RUSTY ENDS BLUES BAND	RUSTY ENDS BLUES BAND	EARWIG
34	MIKE ZITO	RESURRECTION	GULF COAST
35	ROBBIN KAPSALIS AND VINTAGE #18	SOUL SHAKER	BIRD SONG
36	MEMPHISSIPPI SOUNDS	WELCOME TO THE LAND	SELF-RELEASE
37	ERIC BIBB	DEAR AMERICA	PROVOGUE
38	TITO JACKSON	UNDER YOUR SPELL	GULF COAST
39	ELLY WININGER	THE BLUES NEVER END	EARWIG
40	WILLIE JACKSON	ALL IN THE BLUES	SELF-RELEASE
41	SETH LEE JONES	FLATHEAD	HORTON
42	DEB RYDER	MEMPHIS MOONLIGHT	VIZZTONE
43	CURTIS SALGADO	DAMAGE CONTROL	ALLIGATOR
44	GA-20	TRY IT...YOU MIGHT LIKE IT	KARMA CHIEF
45	COREY HARRIS	THE INSURRECTION BLUES	MC
46	THE BLACK KEYS	DELTA KREAM	NONESUCH
47	SUGAR QUEEN AND THE STRAIGHT BLUES BAND	BETTER DAYS	SELF-RELEASE
48	JOSEPH VELOZ	JOSEPH AND THE VELOZIANS	SELF-RELEASE
49	AVEY GROUWS BAND	TELL TALE HEART	NAVY HOUSE
50	DAVID VEST	LIVE AT HERMANN'S	CORDOVA BAY

the way. This is the third album from the band, who incidentally hail from the Swiss town of St Gallen. If you are tempted to seek out a copy, the website is www.eliasbernet.ch

DAVID OSLER

JOE BARR WITH BREEZY RADIO

SOUL FOR THE HEART

DIXIE FROG RECORDS

As I pick this up, I'm familiar with Breezy as I've reviewed an album by him before, he is an excellent guitar player who's paid his dues, but I've not come across Joe before and there's a quote on the back that states he's one of the best soul singers in the world. Along with being one of the greatest organ players in the world, that's some combination, so I'm anticipating a great album putting these boys together. First track is Drown In My Own Tears by the immortal Ray Charles and wow, Joe's voice is as they say, one of the best. He sounds like Ray crossed with Lou Rawls, absolute class from the start, this is listening on your own, late night whiskey drinking music. When I look at the list of songs on this CD, written by such classic artists as Johnny Taylor, Jerry Butler, Teddy Pendergrass, Ray Charles, , and BB King then there's not much can be said other than this needs to be played and played again. Joe's voice leaves me breathless, we know the songs and love them, and these boys do them outstanding justice. I love my old soul, I've seen some of the greats and this is up there, if you want a modern soul /blues album for the 21st century with an old school sound then this is it. Ten tracks in my opinion are not enough and I pray these boys do more and more together. Ain't Nothing You Can Do To Me is the outstanding track for me on this album, the combination of Joe's voice and Breezy' s guitar is just sublime, and I hope they tour the UK one day because I'll be front and centre.

BARRY BLUESBARNN HOPWOOD

KALAMAZOO JUNCTION

OLD TUNES NEW BLUES

33JAZZ

In the spirit of Brownie McGee and Sonny Terry, blues-folk duo guitarist (he of the Kalamazoo guitar) Olly Dowlen and singer Georgia blend an opposites-attract approach to the music contained in Old Tunes New Blues. Proof that music transcends cultures and geographic locations is in this recording as Thailand and Bangkok blues club singer Georgia pours the grit of her soul into every single one of these songs accompanied by Ollie's 1937 Kalamazoo guitar. This first album recorded by the duo boasts six older blues numbers and seven original songs and a closing medley showcasing thrilling harmonica by recently departed collaborator Pete Trigg RIP. There is a beguiling charm in this mix of old and new tracks rubbing elbows together. A case in point is the opening song Outskirts Blues, an original song penned by Olly Dowlen, about the everyday realities of living in an estate on the outskirts of town and Payday, by Mississippi John Hurt, which is interpreted with equal conviction by both artists. An acoustic take on the classic CC Rider and another Dowlen original Get Outa My Car reinforces this smart blend of the old and new and singer Georgia's impassioned interpretation is deserving of extra kudos. However, the palpable poignancy throughout the closing medley of Prelude, Train Tune and In The Pines as a tribute to their deceased friend and musician Peter Trigg is heartfelt blues in full-on action.

PAUL DAVIES

KATIE HENRY

ON MY WAY

RUF RECORDS

Katie Henry returns with her second release. An eclectic mix with ten original songs incorporating blues-based tunes, but it is her vocals that are the overpowering sound to these tracks. She expresses herself in every note and her range suits the songs she sings. Singer songwriter and multi-instrumentalist she has undoubted talent and a great future. Assisted by bass player Antar Goodwin who also co-wrote and drummer Greg Wieczorek in the rhythm section, they are joined by Ben Rice on guitar and Kurt Thum on keyboards. There's even a cameo from harmonica player Giles Robson on the bluesy tune Too Long, Katie's vocals sultry on this stunning track. Opener is, On My Way that has a driving beat, a rocky blues vibe. Empty Cup is an up-tempo tune that showcases the band, very infectious rhythm. Without A Fight has a country roots-based notation. Bury You is a standout track, powerful vocals well delivered, rocky tune with fine keyboards and guitar riffs. Setting Sun changes the tone to an acoustic stripped-down feel, vocally wraps the listener in a cushion of emotions. Got Me Good cranks up the party feel another catchy tune. Blessings is a song from the heart, full of redemption, sung with feeling. Running Round is a piano based ballad again strikingly good vocal. Last track is a highlight, Catch Me If You Can, this sounds a liberating tune and a challenge to her peers from a rising star.

COLIN CAMPBELL

LADY A

SATISFYING

INDEPENDENT

As I write this review it pleases me to be in a position where I'm finding new artists every month. Reading the footnotes this is Lady A's ninth CD but the first time I've heard her which astounds me when the words blues, funk, soul, and gospel are used to describe her and from what I'm hearing she's as authentic as they come. Starting off with Whatever You Do, a feel-good song that has me wishing she was my friend because the positivity explodes into you. The album title track, Satisfying, which can only be described as the most uptown funk I've heard since the Isley Brothers Psychedelic Shack. The trumpet on this track is superb and has me thinking of an old seventies' detective series like Kojak and Starsky and Hutch. Miss Buela Mae's tells a story of strong, hard but fair woman who's not to be funked with, my imagination almost makes this into a Hollywood film, a picture of life sometimes sad, sometimes hard but mostly great, and Big Momma fits right in with it. If there is a story to be told in this album it's, be big, be beautiful but most of all be bold. All this is followed by the hand clapping Blues On My Mind, which has already been made by the time I get to this fifth song, I'm so glad I got sent this CD. if Lady A lived near me, I'd make sure we were friends, especially when she sings about fried wings, this is a

Most Played Album Top 40 – December 2021

Collated From The Playlists Of The Independent Blues Broadcasters Association Members

Position	Artist	Album
1	DION	STOMPING GROUND
2	STARLITE CAMPBELL BAND	THE LANGUAGE OF CURIOSITY
3	WHEN RIVERS MEET	SAVING GRACE
4	SWAMP POETS	HOODOO DU VOODOO
5	THE 2:19	REVELATOR
6	BERNIE MARSDEN	CHESS
7	FRAN MCGILLIVRAY BAND	RAIN
8	DAVE HUNT	BEHIND THE MOON
9	CHICKENBONE SLIM	SERVE IT TO ME HOT
10	GOV'T MULE	HEAVY LOAD BLUES
11	BACKWATER ROLL FEAT. JON AMOR	LIVE AT THE PLATFORM
12	JOE BONAMASSA	TIME CLOCKS
13	MANNY FIZZOTTI	NOBODY UNDERSTANDS
14	JIMMIE VAUGHAN	THE JIMMIE VAUGHAN STORY
15	ANDRES ROOTS	AFTERNOON (EP)
16	THORBJØRN RISAGER & THE BLACK TORNADO	BEST OF
17	HANNA PK	BLUES ALL OVER MY SHOES
18	MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD	DO RIGHT SAY RIGHT
19	BEN LEVIN	STILL HERE
20	CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM	662
21	JIMMY REGAL & THE ROYALS	AIN'T DONE YET EP
22	SLIM BUTLER	BONE DEEP
23	RGP BLUES BAND	COLOURS
24	HARLEY KIMBRO LEWIS	HARLEY KIMBRO LEWIS
25	MARK PONTIN GROUP	KALEIDOSCOPE
26	E D BRAYSHAW	RANDOM REPEAT
27	RUSTY ENDS BLUES BAND	RUSTY ENDS BLUES BAND
28	FIVE POINTS GANG	WANTED
29	MARY STOKES BAND	CLOUDS IN MY HEART
30	LITTLE G WEEVIL	LIVE ACOUSTIC SESSION
31	DAVE SPECTER	SIX STRING SOUL: 30 YEARS ON DELMARK
32	JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR	THE BLUES ALBUM
33	MEMPHISSIPPI SOUNDS	WELCOME TO THE LAND
34	GREYHOUND GEORGE BAND	GET UP & WALK!
35	ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND	HOLLER IF YOU HEAR ME
36	THE OLD NO.5S	MOMENT TO LOSE
37	ROBIN BIBI	NO MORE A SECRET
38	ELLES BAILEY	SHINING IN THE HALF LIGHT
39	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	TEMPTING FATE
40	BETH HART	A TRIBUTE TO LED ZEPPELIN

recipe of everything I love, blues, soul, funk, gospel and life, put into a great big melting pot and out comes the most delicious gumbo of an album.

BARRY BLUESBARN HOPWOOD

MARCO R. WAGNER

BACK TO THE PLOW

SEVERAL RECORDS

Spanish singer/songwriter and guitarist who has spent many years in USA touring with the likes of Sid Griffin and Gene Taylor and honing his craft of Americana/ country music. His latest album contains thirteen original songs recorded at his home studio in Spain during the pandemic and mastered in Nashville by his friend Michael St Leon. Opening track Gredos Sunrise/ Should've Known features a gentle acoustic guitar intro and then Wagner croons his tale of regrets and broken promises. A rippling piano and gentle harmonica riff introduce the yearning lullaby In The Middle Of the Night and then the lengthy title track Back To The Plow is a reflective ballad as Wagner looks back on lost loves. There seems to be a theme recurring here. To Hold But Not Tight is a warning to his lover to avoid asking too much of him and assures her "you know I won't let you down that my love is true". Wagner has a pleasant voice which suits well his songs of loves lost, found, misplaced and sometimes forbidden. Nowhere To Go But Paris is an enigmatic story of a love encountered on a flight and the song starts and finishes on the repeated phrase "You're not alone". Wagner has led an interesting and full life with many fleeting encounters. Or has he? The Spinning Of The Wheels and What's It All About further explore the pain and pleasure of relationships. Ordinary People chronicles hard times working the treadmill and the struggle to pay the bills. The album closes with the pretty, almost whispered, Song For Marina a gentle tale of leaving love behind. There are some uplifting moments in the songs, but I may need a stiff drink to sit through the whole album at one sitting.

DAVE DRURY

MEMPHIS SOUNDS

WELCOME TO THE LAND

LITTLE VILLAGE

Like a blast of fresh wind out of the Mississippi Hill country, one-chord drone with a mesmeric rhythm, an album that has some of the best blues I've heard in a while. The band is comprised of Damion Pearce and Cameron Kimbrough (grandson of Junior Kimbrough). They both sing and play guitar while Damion adds some sweet harmonica and Cameron plays drums. Musically, they bridge the two adjacent areas of North Mississippi and Memphis, Cameron bringing the traditional Blues of the Hill Country (R.L. Burnside, Dickinson family, Othar Turner) together with the more melodic sounds of the Memphis Blues. Add to that Damion Pearce's influences from his father's record collection – which included Parliament/Funkadelic, Bootsy, Dr Dre & the Ohio Players – plus gospel learned while attending church every Sunday and you have the recipe for an original and utterly fascinating music. Produced by Aki Kumar, the album was recorded at the world-famous Sun Studios and, to quote Kimbrough "I knew, you know, that we might not go platinum, but we got some juju on this one". The two feed off each other and the result is a deliciously mesmeric beat with the twin vocals floating in and out of the mix and that sweet harp pulling the riff together. The music almost howls and cries but there is also a happy feel to it all, the impact of two young men experimenting and finding their own way of making their Blues felt. Individual tracks seem to roll into each other, and the album starts and finishes with you having been taken on their musical trip in between. One of the best albums I've heard this year.

ANDY SNIPPER

MISS LADY BLUES

MOE BETTA BLUES

INDEPENDENT

Can't ever remember writing the word Tuscaloosa in a review before however there you have it, a genuine first. Anyway, to be serious Miss Lady Blues, the alter ego of one Kesha Boyd, has a cracking voice and this, I think, sophomore album is very strong. Dripping with deep Soulful Blues over the eight tracks there really is a lot to enjoy here. None of the songs extend past what is generally accepted as the length of a single but that does not mean there is any absence of quality or depth. Quite the reverse. All the songs are originals, any of which would sit happily alongside any of the output from Atlantic, Stax, Motown or PIR. Vocally Miss Lady Blues has a strong delivery style, smoky and sexy. There are a host of horns punching in and out augmenting the fine rhythm section. Oh yes, I like this a lot from the opening cut Back It Up With That Lip through to the closer Can't Be Love. I guess whatever your individual circumstances we can all get onboard with the sentiment of She Ain't Me. That touch of superiority and confidence knowing you are in the pole position is a strong one. On the other hand, discovering that you are strongly Addicted to someone who is a liar and unobtainable is another part of the human condition known to many. What I Want is apt as I want more of Miss Lady Blues and her creative endeav-

ROWLAND JONES
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TINSLEY ELLIS

DEVIL MAY CARE

Alligator Records

Devil May Care is the 20th album that Tinsley Ellis has released as a solo artist. All ten songs are written by Ellis and the album is also co-produced by him and Kevin Mckendree. The album kicks off with One Less Reason, a tune that immediately grabs my attention as its pure blues, nothing more, nothing less. The album continues in this mode with, Right Down The Drain, which allows Ellis to show off his gravelly blues growl to great effect. Apart from the raw gravelly growl, what attracts me so much to this album, and Tinsley Ellis in particular, is his writing of great lyrics while also writing a great piece of music that allows his fellow band members space to express themselves. Don't Bury Our Love has an almost Gary Moore feel to it. I don't mean that they have tried to copy his style in any way, but I could imagine Gary recording this had he have not been taken from us at such an early age. I mean that as

"a serious contender for the album of the year"

a genuine compliment to the writing performing and producing of this album. Step Up, is simply a magnificent blues/funk tune that oozes passion and swings like crazy. What is most appealing is the space that each musician has to bring something to the table, organ, drums, and bass all contributing in their unique way to produce what for me is the best track on the album. 28 Days is a funky, bluesy track that I'm sure would be a crowd favourite at a live gig. I'm imagining Tinsley Ellis and his band performing this in a live setting and just tearing it a new one. Slow Train To Hell concludes what has been a very enjoyable afternoon listening to this marvelous album. Even at this early stage in 2022, I think that Devil May Care is a serious contender for the album of the year.

STEPHEN HARRISON

ours. A very bright future is my prediction for this lady, fabulous stuff.

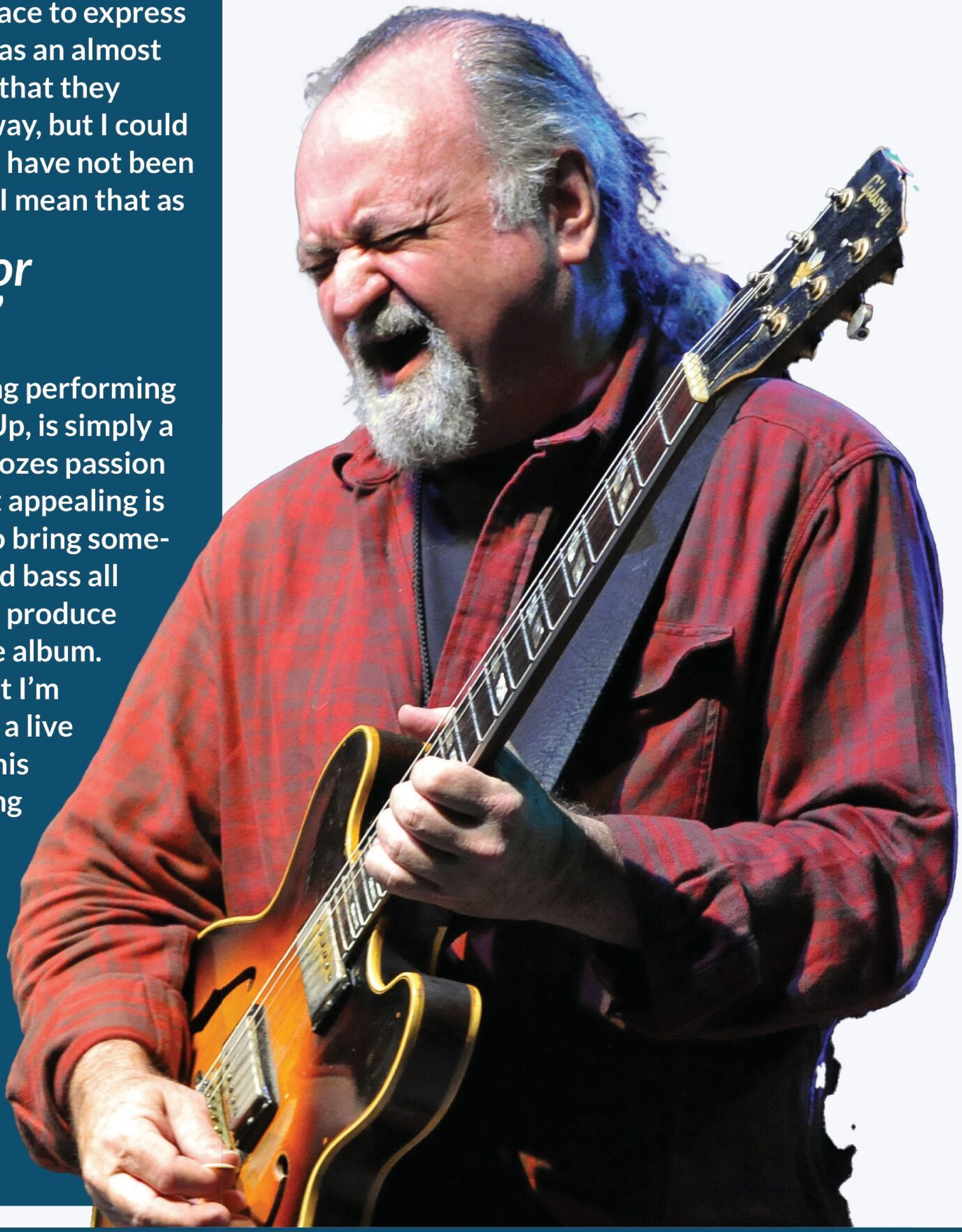
GRAEME SCOTT

ROBBIN KAPSALIS & VINTAGE #18

SOUL SHAKER

BIRD SONG RECORDS

Vintage #18's debut album in 2017 was well received and this is the follow-up, with singer Robbin's name up in lights. There are four covers alongside five originals written by Robbin, much of the album is upbeat and aimed at the feet; for example, Boogaloo is a classic dance tune, Jukin' describes a new place in town where it's dancing or nothing and Lil' Ed Williams' The Cannonball is another song about a dance craze. The band is a quartet, but horns appear on four tracks, led by saxophonist Ron Holloway who has collaborated in the past with Warren Haynes, Gov't Mule and The Allmans. Robbin's deep alto is set against Bill Holter's rock-oriented guitar licks and the horn riff on an opening cover of Shake It Baby, credited to Buddy Guy and Junior Wells. Silver Spoon is an autobiographical song which romps along with Bill's jagged guitar double -tracked over his rhythm work as Robbin describes her early life: "I was born in Chicago, raised in the dirty South". You



Our

Don't Deserve Me finds Robbin ridding herself of an unfaithful lover, a song that must be important to her as it appears in two versions, the second, subtitled 'Extended Groove', running to seven minutes. Away from the dance-oriented tunes From The Heart Of One is a quieter song with what sounds like acoustic bass and provides an opportunity for Robbin to show us a gentler vocal style, the horns give a jazzy feel to Lost Souls, aided in particular by the bubbling bass line, and Deb Ryder's Living Large, a description of the costs of fame, is taken at a slightly slower pace than most of the album. Fever is the Little Willie John tune most familiar from Peggy Lee's version; Robbin's voice has an appropriately sultry edge, but the rocky guitar sounds out of place here. This is a good album with a strong singer out front.

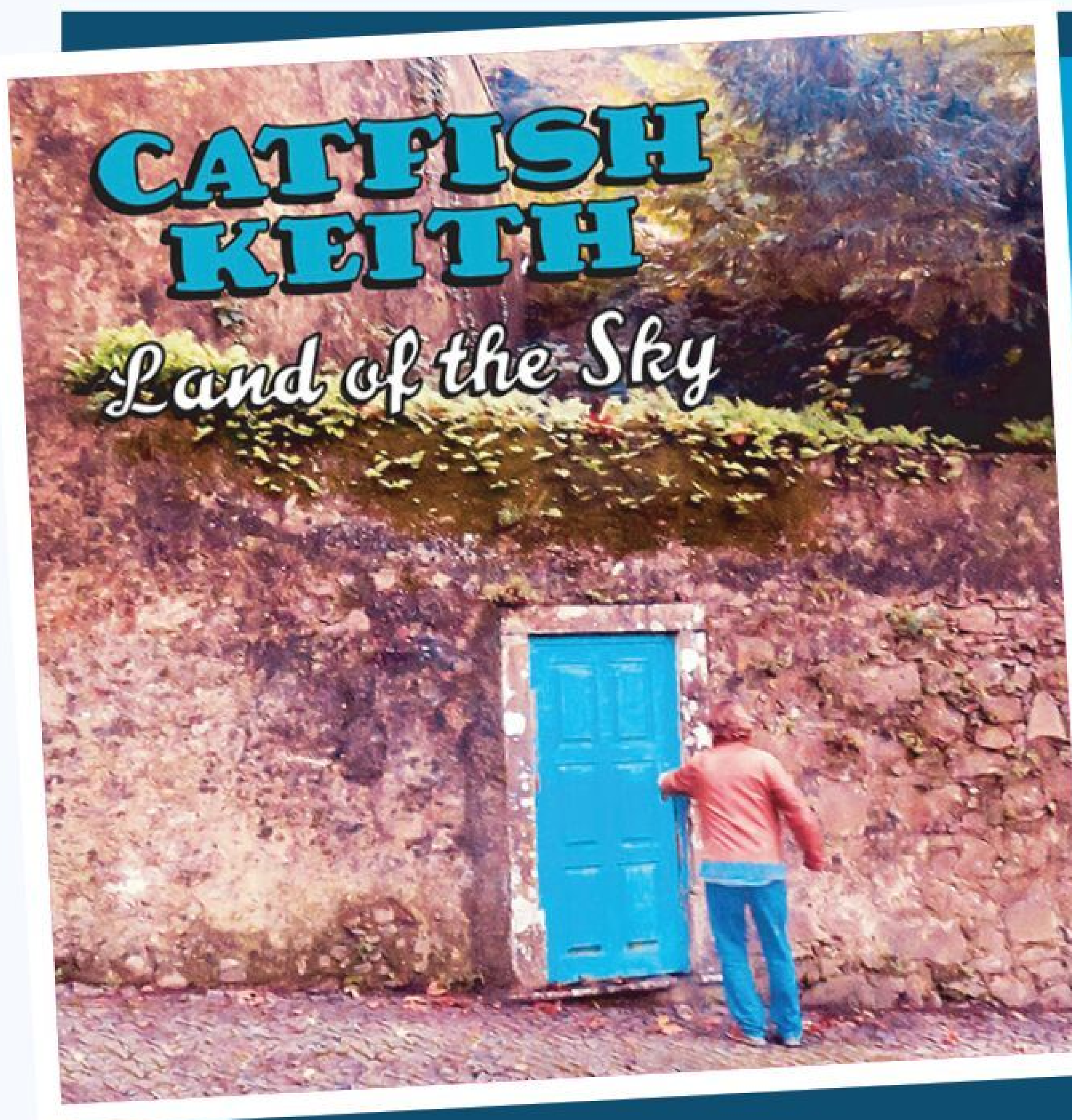
JOHN MITCHELL

SMOOTH MOTION

BOOGIE INSIDE

INDEPENDENT

With that album title, and five of the eight tracks including the word "boogie" in their titles, it might come as a slight surprise to learn that Smooth Motion is a young four-piece band out of Brittany in France, operating at the bluesier end of the classic rock spectrum, but don't make the mistake of expecting a modern Canned Heat. They have recorded both garage rock and progressive rock in the past; here however the focus is often on powerhouse guitar and organ rock in the vein of classic Deep Purple, but also with plenty of blues influence in evidence. I'm not sure if the names I have for the guys are real names or stage names, but singer/ guitarist Screaming Pussy dips occasionally into the Robert Plant book for his vocals, listen to his wailing on Love You For A Night, and organist Mr Organ Fury is aptly named, and a huge presence throughout. The rhythm section of Beardy Ass on bass and Dr. Mad Drum (guess what instrument?) drive things along in classic fashion and occasionally add some unexpected elements, listen to the opening of Tired And Unwilling. Atomic Boogie and Nobody's Boogie are both finely balanced between blues-rock and classic rock (if such a distinction can



CATFISH KEITH

LAND OF THE SKY

Fish Tail Records CD

Another year draws to a close and a reviewer's thoughts drift back through all the releases and he wonders which one will still grab him this time next year. Well, there's no contest with this CD. The charismatic Catfish Keith is as satisfying a blues artist as anyone could wish. Four decades of touring, in which he's shared stages with such luminaries as Ray Charles, John Lee Hooker and many more, have molded this East Chicago musician into a monumental and utterly reliable blues craftsman.

The production on this recording is impeccable. For not only are the mature vocals strong and crystal clear, but the sheer variety of acoustic guitars on the album, Keith plays nine(!!) will have any guitar nut chomping at the bit. The titanic iron sound of the Santa Cruz Catfish Special guitar on the opener, Way Out on The Mountain, draws you in immediately. On Samson and Delilah, he treats the song with stately grace by using a National Reso-Phonic 'Exploding

"All hail Catfish Keith, a blues inspiration"

Palm' Baritone Tricorn. On the holiday classic by Walter Davis, Santa Claus Blues, Catfish treats us to his Ralph Brown 'Barbecue Bob' style Stella-style 12 string. It's one of those sounds which echo throughout blues heritage, as is the silky-smooth instrumental Listen to The Mockingbird played on the Fraulini Loretta Parlour Guitar. Every one of these thirteen numbers, due to the simple clarity of one man, one voice, one guitar, is a delight. Keith is steeped in the finest traditions; Charley Patton, Gary Davis, Lil 'Son Jackson, the Carter Family. They're all rubbing strong shoulders here. Is this my acoustic blues album of the year? Damn right. All hail Catfish Keith, a blues inspiration.

ROY BAINTON

BERNARD ALLISON

HIGHS & LOWS

Ruf Records

Bernard's newest release was recorded, mixed and engineered by Jim Gaines at Bessie Blues Studios Tennessee. George Moye plays bass guitar and Dylan Salfer on guitar from Bernard's touring band join him as does drummer Steve Potts, Toby Lee Marshall on keyboards and Jose James on saxophone on eleven self or co-written tunes including two interpretations of his father Luther's tunes, Now You Got It and I Gave It All. The band bursts out the traps with So Excited, an energetic song about playing live music again. Highs & Lows is a funky tune about reflecting on his life and changes thereby some excellent guitar playing here, rhythm keeps a tone going. Strain On My Heart is all about his soaring vocal range on this modern R&B style tune, this builds up well and the saxophone is sultry. My Way Or The Highway has guest guitarist and vocalist Colin James joining him, here Bernard

"Highs & Lows is a funky tune about reflecting on his life and changes thereby some excellent guitar playing"

plays an organ guitar, the sonics are superb, the groove changes throughout. Side Step is true blues, full of superb musicianship, cutting lyrics and passionate guitar playing. Bobby Rush joins in on The Hustler, a particular favourite, the bass driven introduction, Bobby's harmonica then the band lets rip, then Bobby's vocals a true winner of a tune. My Kind Of Girl, brings soul to the mix, mellow grooves, Bernard's vocals really suit this song. Satisfy Her Needs, keeps the rhythm smooth. Last song, Last Night is another powerful song full of twists and note changes.

COLIN CAMPBELL

be made!), whilst Hemp Street Boogie is certainly in the blues-rock camp, and the closing We Don't Know Nothing adds in an element of classic Rolling Stones maybe. This is powerhouse stuff throughout the set then, and it should certainly appeal to those with a taste for bluesy classic rock.

NORMAN DARWEN

SUGARAY RAYFORD

IN TOO DEEP

FORTY BELOW RECORDS

Sugaray is back with another release full of soul, old style rhythm and blues etching his emotion and feeling to every lyric and chord he sings. More than anything there is a raw honesty and passion to his music style, backed up by classical horn driven tunes, sonic harmonies, and contemporary grooves. Ten songs that are uplifting, resonant and full of social comment. Opener, Invisible Soldier alludes to his traumatic times as a Marine and aftershocks of war, played to a funky backbeat. Always a force to be reckoned with; his vocal delivery on In Too Deep is self-reflecting, great rhythm on this. No Limit To My Love is well orchestrated mixing strings with funky guitar and that voice just silky smooth. Under The Crescent Moon has swampy New Orleans tones bursting through, infectious. Miss Information is another highlight, a fun track with great percussion, wah wah pedals and pulsating groove. Please Take My Hand is acapella with bass drum clapping and cowbells a powerful song of the oppressed. One, is a call to arms to save the planet, a great arrangement. Gonna Lift You Up does just that, horn section on top of uplifting vocals, a feelgood tune. Golden Lady Of The Canyon is a country ballad type but given a Stax feel with Rick Holmstrom on guitar a winning blend. Last song is United We Stand is the party track, peppered throughout with fun lyrics and groove. Suga never sounded so sweet, a brilliant release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

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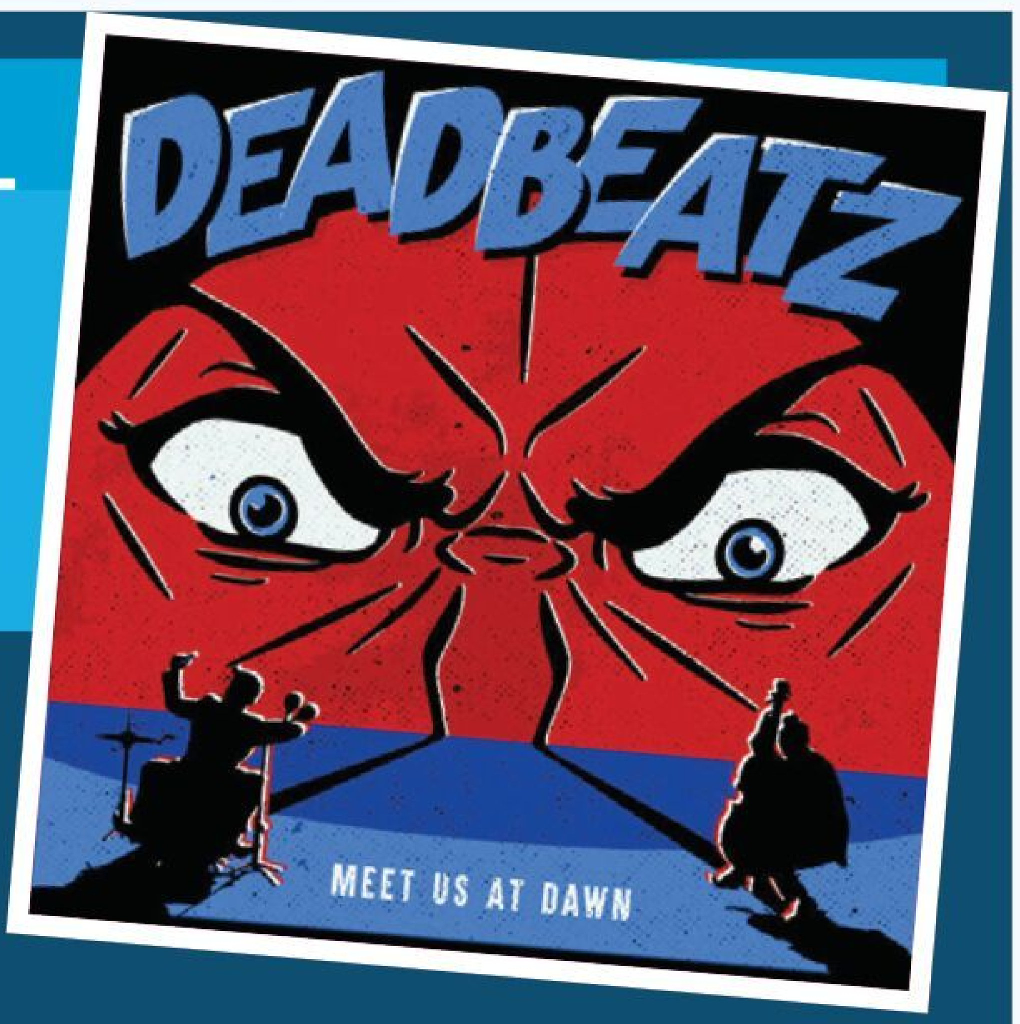

SBAM RECORDS

DeadBeatz bill themselves as 'too blues to be punk, too punk to be blues. As a 1970s teenager, I've always seen a lot of commonalities between the two genres, not least because they boil down to the same three chords and attitude is always more important than ability.

This band are a two-piece from Austria, made up of David Karlinger on drums and harp and Bernie Miller on bass and vocal, with nary a guitar lick in sight. The recording stays resolutely true to the lo-fi ethos that characterised punk first time round. I'm not sure whether the muddiness of the mix is deliberate, but it doesn't help the duo make the case for their unusual format.

"the album certainly kicks ass, in the rawest garage band kind of way"

That said, the album certainly kicks ass, in the rawest garage band kind of way. Most of the 11 tracks appear to be written by the guys themselves or their mates. However, it is the two covers that stand out. Little Walter's Too Late is handled in a way songwriter Willie Dixon would never have imagined. And it's good to see a little love for Juke Boy Bonner, perhaps the original one-man band, with a rendition of his best-known number Runnin' Shoes.

DeadBeatz seem to get a lot of gigs on the European circuit and give the impression of being a genuine good night out live band. But their next venture into the studio would benefit from being a little more polished.

DAVID OSLER

THE GEORGIA THUNDER-BIRDS

CAN WE GET A WITNESS

MASCOT LABEL GROUP

Dual guitars, screaming enthusiastic vocals, great rhythm section, this five-piece band have it all in bundles of classic rock with a southern tinge. This is a hard driven no holds barred roller coaster of a debut release. Grabs the listener with a stunning opener, Take It Slow, has an incendiary tempo. Lend A Hand has an infectious chorus with a real swagger to the tone of the Gibson Les Paul soundscape. So, You Wanna Change The World slows the tempo on this ballad, but still packs a punch, vocals by TJ Lyle are clear and understated and the backing just gives a glowing feel to the track. Looking For An Old Friend has a lived-in feel and keeps the southern spirit flowing but with their own interpretation of the genre. Spirit Of A Working Man is the hook track with mesmeric guitar work backing powerful vocal delivery. Their take on the Allman Brothers; Midnight Rider is melodic, with a guitar solo from Riley Couzzort that is just phenomenal. Be Good To Yourself keeps that classic rock feel to the Frankie Miller tune. Half Glass Woman has punctuated harmonica tones to another pacy tune, this release just keeps giving. Dancin' With The Devil has a great bass line and is a slow burner. Thirteen songs, roll on, Can We Get A Witness ebbs and flows with rhythm and tone and an undoubted crowd pleaser is the final track Set Me Free, an epic tune.

COLIN CAMPBELL

THE MICK SCHAFER BAND

BACK TO THE BLUES

LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE RECORDS

This release is so refreshing with its stripped back laconic electric blues style, Mick's strong vocals are distinct, and the production mix puts them firmly out front. Not that the supporting band are any slouches as Mick has handpicked them from Portland's thriving blues scene and includes guitarist Ken 'Willie' Scandlyn and drummer Jimi Bott who between them have won numerous blues nominations and awards. Mick has been a keen talented musician and vocalist since his school days who has tried desperately to make "music" his living for over twenty years but without success until now. With this album Mick draws on his lifelong passion for the blues, the ten self-written songs cover a variety of subjects from religion to family life. Two key musicians on the album are Timmer Blakely on bass and fiddle player Tom Esch who have doubled up on production duties with Mick. They score highly in both roles, the use of fiddle in an electric blues band is unusual but in this case it works well particularly on the opening track Over In The Corner, where it weaves the song together while Mick delivers a strong pleading vocal, which includes the line "Daddy hooked on woman, Mama hooked on gin", true blues lyrics. The pick of the tracks is If I Win The Blues which has some subtle slide guitar work and another strong vocal although the strength of the album is that there are no filler tracks, each song stands on its own merits. This album has been

a long time coming but is full of heartfelt material and musicianship that makes it stand out from the crowd, if Mick can keep this band together Iam confident he will move up the ladder of Blues prominence.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

THE RAGGED ROSES

DO ME RIGHT

ROOTZ RUMBLE

This is a debut album by a Belgian quartet that blends rockabilly, rock and roll and just a soupçon of blues; the band name-checks Nick Curran, Dick Dale, Howling Wolf, Etta James, and Wanda Jackson among their influences. Eleven songs were written by guitar player Bart Rico Ulens, five in partnership with vocalist Katrien Van Proeyen. Bassist Sebi Lee adds occasional piano, sax and backing vocals and his upright bass adds a warm bottom end to the music while drummer Jimmy Van Iersel keeps busy on a generally upbeat selection, typified by frantic rockers like Right Track, Never Gonna Break My Heart and the title track which fairly belts along, the guitar adding a jangly, rock and roll feel to all these tunes. Cravin' For Your Lovin' uses the guitar riff from One Way Out and would not be suitable for mainstream radio, as Katrien states explicitly what she is looking forward to when her man returns home! Sugar Coated Lovin' has some resemblance to the Lucky Lester song but sounds as if the Hamburg-era Beatles are playing it. There are just two tracks on which the pace drops and gives Katrien the opportunity to add a sultry tone to her vocals which have just a trace of accent: Falling Out Of Love and album closer Way Back Home. The sole cover is Del Shannon's Runaway, a tune that Samantha Fish also covered on her debut album; The Ragged Roses emphasise the border feel of the song by adding a prelude that features the bass and some very Mexican-sounding guitar before Katrien enters with the familiar lyrics. It is hard to sit still to the music of The Ragged Roses, so if you are a fan of this sort of catchy rockabilly you now have the pleasure of a new band to discover.

JOHN MITCHELL

ROWLAND JONES & THE MOVEABLE FEAST

LIVE @ OSWESTRY

INDEPENDENT

On this latest release, Rowland recorded a superb solo concert at a small but very atmospheric club. Here is another excellent live release with his band, Bo Lee on bass guitar and Iain Mellor on percussion. They are a cohesive trio and really add a full-bodied sound to Rowland's seven tunes. He is a great storyteller and accomplished songwriter mixing all flavours of blues rooted music peppered with soul and Americana roots music. Recorded at Hermon Chapel Arts Centre this captures the notation and artistry of a fine guitarist and here Rowland's vocals are stronger and resonate well with the band. True True Blues starts things off, mellow almost Latino effects here, clear vocals meet a mellow groove. Always Thought is a slow love ballad, with a smokey blues club feel sung with reflective tones full of passion. Listen to the lyrics on A Million Ways, so cutting and precise, with a backbeat to get lost in.

THE CINELLI BROTHERS

VILLA JUKE-JOINT

Independent

The Cinelli Brothers are the ultimate feelgood party band, they exude happiness, and they entertain to the maximum. Their music is infused in the blues genre with dashes of soul, rhythm and blues and boundless enthusiasm. They are, Marco Cinelli on lead vocals, guitar, and keyboards, he is the band leader. Nanni Cinelli does drum and bassline. Tom Jones is vocalist, guitarist, and harmonica player. Enzo Strano keeps bass, double bass chords going. Their newest release is just wonderful, full of passion, fun lyrics, and finesse. The deluxe version has a booklet of cartoons, simply great packaging, showing their fun side.

Eighteen songs on this version all-encompassing that great sound they have. Whether it be the raucous opener, Choo Ma Gum with infectious chorus or the mellow tones of the bluesy Save Me, this release always delivers their personality. Wanna Have A Good Time personifies the feelgood factor paced to perfection with a mighty horn section to boot. Last Cigarette is a particular favourite, with a smoky blues club atmospheric, yet this release was recorded in their living room via one Rode NTR ribbon microphone.

> *"A band gaining notoriety, buy this and revisit why blues still matters"*

Two covers; Homework and Long Distance Call are coated with their own style bringing a contemporary feel. Grandchildren Of The Blues exemplifies the reason they play this music style and the musicianship on this release is stunning.

A band gaining notoriety, buy this and revisit why blues still matters. Insanely infectious blues as it should be played, outstanding release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Don't Play With Fire moves the tempo up but again the lyrics are the key, the trio let themselves get into a groove here, divine. Never Final tune, Never Been To Memphis is another upbeat blues tune, a great arrangement of this song incorporating various themes, the tempo rises throughout giving the audience a night to remember.

COLIN CAMPBELL

ANDRES ROOTS

TARTU LOCKDOWN

Andres Roots is a bluesman based in Estonia, a guy who has topped blues charts repeatedly in his home country. This release features thirteen tracks and highlights his versatility with electric guitar and cigar-box slide. Recorded basically as a rough, at home project in the midst of Covid pandemic restrictions in Estonia, Roots used his time to record what he describes as drafts of work in March, April and May 2020. Each month brings a fresh sound, and an interesting exploration of down-home recording that seems to mix downtown home-porch styles with raggedy juke-joint sounds. The tracks are self-penned and Roots brings his fine fretwork and quality to the mjix with an air of excitement and experience that should work well for those who prefer their blues to be both experimental without straying too far from the traditional path and raw-edged. As a personal favourite, I plump for the April recordings with two tracks, Minor Gripes and the bouncy Springtime Blues as stand-out performances. Roots considers them drafts as normally he woud only record material when he believed it was fully studio-recording ready and fully fledged. Tartu Lockdown is more of an interesting and enjoyable bit of rough work-in-progress. It comes to you warts and all, with nothing to hide and a surprisingly enjoyable along-for-the-ride feel.

IAIN PATIENCE

FRANK FOTUSKY & GRANT DERMODY

DIGGIN' IN JOHN'S BACKYARD

This pair are both US blues masters working the rich acoustic blues seem. Dermody is one of the genre's top blues harp masters while Fotusky is a picker with a grasp of the music and the culture behind it. Together for the first time on a recording platform, they are a perfect match, feeding off each other all the way. The album is tribute to their shared connection, a deep, lasting one, to US blues great, John Jackson. Jackson was of course known for his close connection with the late Virginia State blues picker, John Cephas. And the album reflects that duo's finest work with it's own verve and a clear appreciation and mastery of the pair's original blues work. The new album, Diggin' in John's Backyard, was inspired by their shared connection to the late John Jackson, the Virginia bred country blues guitarist and master of the Piedmont style who gave up in 1949, only to be "rediscovered" in the 1960's.

Grant's journey on the harmonica started with the wide open, amplified Chicago sound. He first started studying and playing acoustic blues - Piedmont and Delta style, when he was hired to teach harmonica in the mid-1990's. It was then that he first met John Jackson and John Cephas. The two master bluesmen from Virginia would become great friends and mentors, and the strongest of musical influences.

Frank's connection to John Jackson has a similar trajectory: he was drawn to John Jackson's music, eventually got to meet him and they became great friends. John was not only a musical mentor to Frank; he impressed upon him the great human quality of kindness. This is an excellent addition to any blues-lovers' collection. Highly recommended.

IAIN PATIENCE

HANS THEESSINK & BIG DADDY WILSON

PAY DAY

BLUE GROOVE RECORDS

Hans Theessink is readily one of Europe's finest acoustic bluesmen. His facility with six, twelve-strings and slide is second to none. Team him up with US great, Big Daddy Wilson, and you have the immediate makings of something truly special. And Pay Day is a fabulous bit of acoustic blues music, as good as anything out there. The title track comes, of course, from the work of the great Mississippi John Hurt and is partnered here with a variety of great traditional, old-school blues tracks including, Everybody Ougt to Treat a Stranger Right; Hard Time Killing Floor; Denomination Blues; Old Man Trouble; and a range of solid blues to complete this sixteen-track masterpiece. Pay Day already has that feel of a classic and a contender for an album of the year. Theessink is a noted performer and his annual birthday bashes in Vienna, Austria, where he is based are always favourites. Indeed, his last album, in 2019, was a Live bash recording. Wilson is well-known to many for his quality blues work and recent joint recordings with Eric Bibb. Overall, the fretwork and picking here is excellent, the material undeniably top-notch and Wilson's deep, stirring vocals work perfectly throughout. An absolute winner.

IAIN PATIENCE

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